

Palestinian National Authority angry over '60 Minutes' show on corruption

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AP) — Angry over a "60 Minutes" show about human rights abuses and government corruption, an adviser to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat told CBS Television crews they will no longer have free access to cover events and interview Palestinian officials.

However, the Palestinian information ministry said the adviser was expressing his own views and that the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) had made

no such decision.

In a front-page article Tuesday in the Palestinian newspaper Al Quds, President Arafat's adviser Bassam Abu Sharif accused CBS' "60 Minutes" of intentionally setting out to damage the image of the PNA and the Palestinian people.

"I am sorry that some irresponsible Palestinians took part in the programme," Mr. Abu Sharif said.

Dan Mogulof, head of the CBS bureau in Tel Aviv, said CBS was taking the

complaint "very seriously" and was discussing the matter with Palestinian officials.

However, the Palestinian information ministry disavowed Mr. Abu Sharif's letter. "It's not true that the Palestinian Authority has taken action against CBS," the ministry, which accredits its foreign journalists, said in a statement.

"This issue wasn't discussed in the Palestinian cabinet or any other meeting," Bassam Abu Sharif has no authority to take such

decisions, and all that was published about a decision and letters sent to the CBS is nonsense.

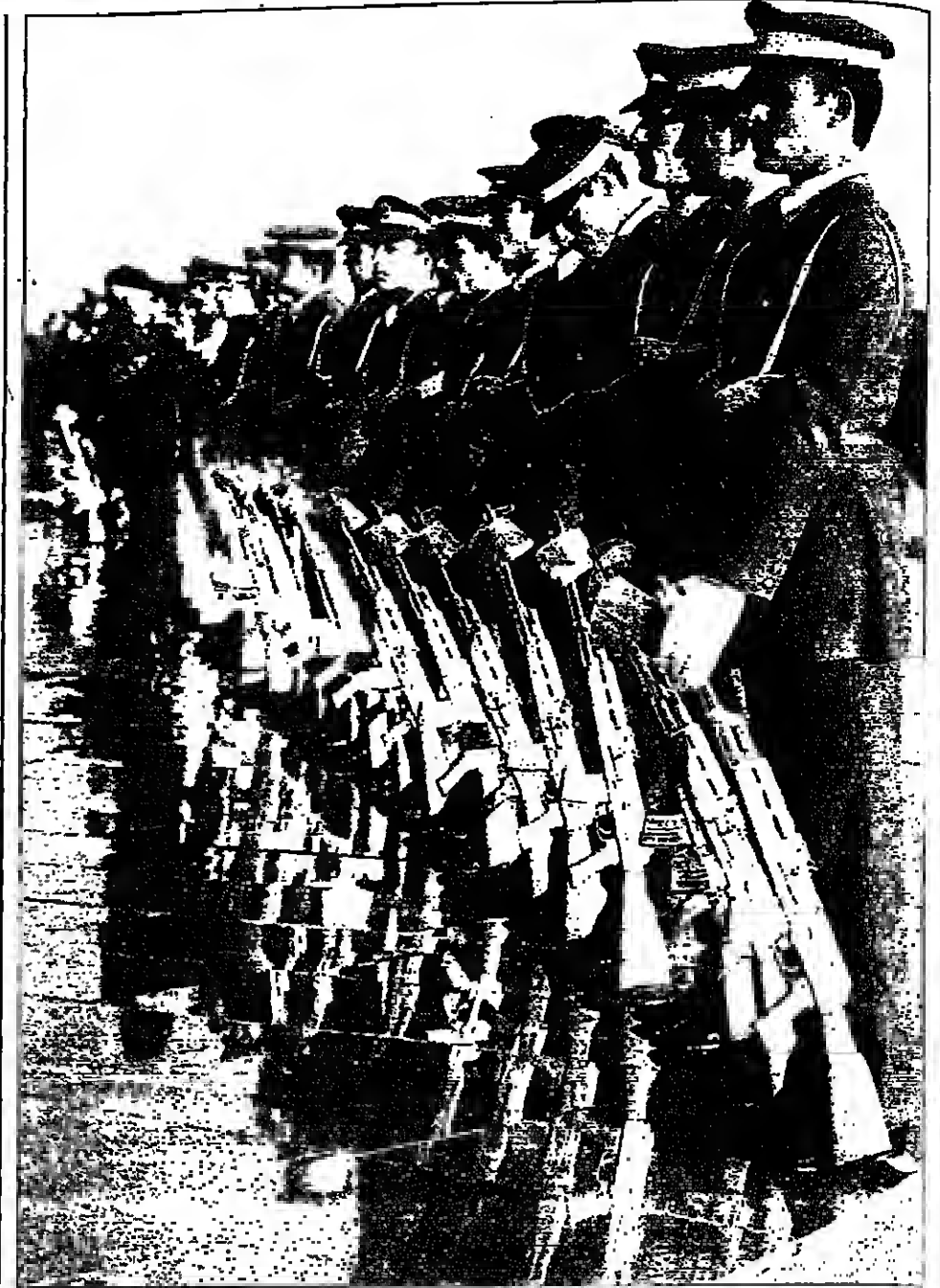
Palestinian sources said Mr. Abu Sharif had little influence in the government and appeared to be acting on his own.

The "60 Minutes" report, which aired Dec. 7, was by New York-based correspondent Ed Bradley. Entitled "Brother vs Brother," the segment largely focused on allegations of human rights violations, including torture, by the

PNA.

It also said that prices for such items as cigarettes, cement, flour and gasoline had risen because the products were controlled by monopolies controlled by the PNA.

The New York Times on Tuesday quoted "60 Minutes" executive producer Don Hewitt as saying the show had attempted to pursue a claim by Mr. Abu Sharif that Israel was involved in the corruption, but found no evidence to support it.



The Iraqi guard of honour stand to attention, Tuesday in Najaf, south of Baghdad, during the 77th anniversary of Iraq's armed forces which have an estimated 387,500 soldiers, according to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Iraqi Defence Minister General Sultan Hashem Ahmad said the armed forces were still 'capable of defending the country despite the blockade,' the U.N. embargo in force since the 1990 invasion of Kuwait (AFP photo)

Sudan's Islamist leader slams parties, but predicts their return

KHARTOUM (AFP) — Sudan's Islamist leader Hassan Abdullah Al Turabi has lashed out at the country's outlawed political parties, but at the same time predicted that parties will be reestablished.

Mr. Turabi, the speaker of parliament and the religious power behind the military junta in Khartoum, launched a ferocious attack on "sectarian" parties in the maiden issue of a new paper, Al Usbou (The Week), published on Tuesday.

He accused parties banned by the junta, which seized power in a June 1989 coup against an elected civilian government, of "disintegrating the country and squandering its energies."

Mr. Turabi also criticised, but did not name, those he called partisan opponents of the government, describing them as "agents" of the United States, which in his view, "moves them at its will."

"Some Sudanese were masters of our people and have now become servants, not of Allah, but of others who intend to strike at Sudan," Mr. Turabi said, in reference to ousted Prime Minister Sadeq Al Mahdi, leader of the Umma Party, and Mohammad Osman Al Mirghani of the Democratic Unionist

Party (DUP).

Many opposition leaders have gone into exile, largely in neighbouring Egypt or Eritrea, and have formed an alliance with rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) who have been fighting for nearly 15 years to end Islamist domination of the mainly Christian and animist south of Africa's largest country.

Mr. Turabi insisted that he remained a "unitarian" and an advocate of a single-party system. "I am a unitarian calling for unity of the Sudanese people, using the tongue rather than the spear, as our faith tells us that our God is one, our party is one and our path to God is one."

But he confirmed that contacts were currently being conducted with political opponents inside and outside Sudan and that mediators, who were "mostly Sudanese," have been engaged in shuttle diplomacy.

"The government is committed to carrying on with dialogue, although some intend to disconnect this dialogue and take power by force," Mr. Turabi said without elaborating.

Mr. Mahdi's Umma Party is based around the Ansar sect, whose name means support-

ers of Mohammad Ahmad Al Mahdi who set up an Islamist state in Sudan in the late 19th century. Mr. Mirghani's DUP has its backing in the Khartoum religious movement.

Their own coalition period in power saw ongoing strife with rebels who are seeking a secular Sudan and much greater autonomy for the south.

Mr. Turabi's attack on Washington came after U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in December held unprecedented talks in Uganda with the Sudanese opposition, meeting SPLA chief Colonel John Garang, and three other leaders in the opposition National Democratic Alliance (NDA), which linked up with him in 1995.

On Western estimates, the conflict has directly or indirectly claimed at least a million lives and displaced many scores of thousands of people. Despite his opposition to multi-party politics, Mr. Turabi, who leads the National Islamic Front — banned along with all other movements and trade unions after the 1989 coup — said the current efforts for reconciliation "will lead to political multiplicity that may be a form of parties in one way or another."

Top lawyer for Egyptian Islamists quits over violence

CAIRO (AFP) — Muntasser Al Zayat, the prominent lawyer for Egyptian Islamist activists, on Tuesday said he would no longer defend Islamists because he had failed to achieve a halt to violence.

"I tried, with others, to halt the violence and the bloodshed [but] I failed in my mission and it is time I retire," Mr. Zayat said in a statement.

"I have to free all my public activities and retire from public activities," said Mr. Zayat, 43, who was arrested four times for links to Islamist activists.

"I apologise to my friends in Liman Tora prison for leaving them stranded in the middle of the road before they were able to reach their goal" to halt violence, he added.

The six founding members of Egypt's key armed Islamist group, Gamaa Islamiyah, in July issued a statement from their cells at Tora prison south of Cairo calling for a halt to violence.

But Gamaa claimed responsibility for several subsequent attacks, including the massacre of 58 tourists and four Egyptians outside a Pharaonic temple in Luxor on Nov. 17.

Deep rifts have emerged between Gamaa leaders and Islamists in Egypt and abroad since the massacre. "Violence continues and the political situation in the country is complicated," said Mr. Zayat, who initially made the announcement at the military trial Monday of 65 Gamaa members.

Mr. Zayat said the trial would be his last defending armed Islamists, along with two other cases.

"The cause to which I devoted myself has become confused," he said.

"For 20 years I have been caught in the crossfire of the government and the religious group," he added. Mr. Zayat was imprisoned from 1981 until 1984 following a trial connected to the 1981 assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat by members of Jihad, Egypt's second armed Islamist group.

He was also jailed for seven months in 1994 for contacting Gamaa members abroad.

Iraq says it can 'instil horror' in hearts of American soldiers

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's fighting potential and has the capability to instil horror in the hearts of the armed forces of the United States, Israel and Turkey, the Babel newspaper said in a front-page editorial.

The Al Iraq newspaper warned Turkey not to fall into what it called a "Zionist trap" aimed at drawing Turkey away from Arab states.

Arab states have criticised the joint manoeuvres as harmful to the Middle East peace process.

"Our army has boosted its fighting potential and has the capability to instil horror in the hearts of the armed forces of the United States, Israel and Turkey," the Babel newspaper said in a front-page editorial.

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Iraq in 1996 and again in 1997 in pursuit of Kurdish rebels fighting for autonomy in southern Turkey.

Also Tuesday, President Saddam praised the army in a speech that was noteworthy for what it did not include — criticism of the United States or Iraq's strained relations with the United Nations.

President Saddam spoke for only 18 minutes, an unusually short time for the Iraqi leader.

The speech was given to mark the 77th anniversary of the creation of the Iraqi army.

Mordechai: Beirut must control south Lebanon before pullback

BINT JBEIL (AFP) — Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai called on Beirut Tuesday to exercise control over south Lebanon as a condition for an Israeli pullback there.

"We are ready to apply resolution 425 of the [U.N.] Security Council [on Israeli withdrawal] on condition that the Lebanese government, supported by its army, exercises control over south Lebanon," Mr.

Mordechai told journalists here.

Mr. Mordechai spoke during a tour of Israel's self-declared security zone in southern Lebanon Tuesday.

Israel on Sunday for the first time publicly accepted U.N. resolution 425, which was adopted in 1978 and calls for Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon. But it insisted any pullout must be accompanied by security guarantees.

"Israel is ready to accept Resolution 425 provided that it is possible to reach an agreement with Lebanon which will ensure the security procedures required by Israel," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

Israel occupies a self-declared security zone in south Lebanon to protect its northern territory from attacks by anti-Israeli groups, led by Hizbollah.

Israel says anti-missile missile project a year off track

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israel's bid to develop an anti-missile missile to counter threats from Syria and Iran has fallen more than a year behind schedule due to a fire at an arms factory and bureaucratic wrangling, an official said Tuesday.

Ephraim Sneh, chairman of a parliamentary subcommittee on defence affairs, said an investigation by his

panel had found serious management errors surrounding the joint U.S.-Israeli programme to develop the Arrow ballistic missile interceptor.

Mr. Sneh said a fire last April at the Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) plant building the Arrow set the project back six to nine months.

"Grave defects" in the plant's design impeded the

effectiveness of firefighting equipment and the blaze ultimately caused extensive damage costing nearly \$30 million, he said.

Delays caused by the fire were compounded by a dispute between the finance ministry and IAI, the highest state defence firm, said Mr. Sneh, a former general and a leading member of the opposition Labour Party.

"The ministry of finance wanted to impose some changes on IAI and used financing of the Arrow project as leverage to obtain those changes," he told Israel Radio. He said the wrangling caused an additional six-month delay in development of the missile.

News of the delay came amid growing Israeli concern with Iran's programme to

develop long-range missiles. Media reports from the U.S. said Iran recently tested an engine for a missile capable of reaching Israel and could deploy the weapon within a year.

Israel says the Tehran government is developing chemical and biological weapons for its missiles. It also says Syria is building missiles able to reach far into Israel.

JORDAN TELEVISION

PROGRAMME TWO
14:10.....Jonny Quesi
14:30.....French Programmes
16:15.....Prayers
16:30.....Believe and Behave
17:00.....Border Town
17:30.....The Finder
18:00.....Neighbours
18:30.....News Headlines
18:35.....Step By Step
19:00.....Le Journal
19:15.....Ramadan Talks
19:35.....Naure of Healing
20:00.....The Upper Hand
20:30.....Challenges
21:10.....Kung Fu
22:00.....News in English
22:30 A Woman of Independent Means
23:15.....Country Music
23:59.....Islam in a Changing World

PRAYER TIMES

05:10.....Fajr
06:32.....(Sunrise) Doha
11:42.....Dhuhr
14:28.....'Asr
16:51.....Maghreb
18:13.....'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church Swifefeh, Tel. 810740
Assemblies of God Church Tel. 632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 624590

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 637440
De la Salle Church Tel. 661757
Terra Sancta Church Tel. 622366
Anglican Church Tel. 652826
Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 771331
Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 775261
St. Ephraim Church Tel. 771751
Amman International Church Tel. 5516245
Evangelical Lutheran Church Tel. 824328
German-speaking Evangelical Congregation Tel. 688404
The Latter-Day Saints Tel. 654932
Church of Nazarene Tel. 675691
The Evangelical Local Church in Amman Tel. 811295
English-speaking Latin Catholics Parish Tel. 614190

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Skies will be cloudy to partly cloudy with a chance of occasional showers, particularly over mountainous areas, and winds westerly moderate. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, winds easterly moderate, and seas calm.

Amman06/13
Aqaba09/20
Deserts.....05/14
Jordan Valley.....10/19
Yesterday's high temperatures:
Amman 13, Aqaba 20 Humidity readings: Amman 90 per cent, Aqaba 35 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY
Dr. Bassam Karadshah 4389300
Dr. Ramzi Mazzawi 894788
Dr. Salman Duboubi 776751
Dr. Khalid Abdo 657129
Firas pharmacy 661912
Ferdous pharmacy 390280
Al Asama pharmacy 637055
Al Salam pharmacy 636730
Yacoub pharmacy 644945
Shmeisani pharmacy 637660
Nalroukh pharmacy 623072
Najib pharmacy 347632
IRBID:
Dr. Ghazi Ta'ameh 250080
Dr. Samir Al Lawzi 989601
Khalifeh pharmacy 985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 637111
Civil Defence Department 661111
Civil Defence Immediate

Rescue 630341
Civil Defence Emergency 199
Rescue Police 192, 621111, 637777
Fire Brigade 617101
Blood Bank 775121
Highway Police 343402
Traffic Police 896390
Public Security Department 630321
Hotel Complaints 605800
Price Complaints 661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints 897467
Amman Municipality Complaints 787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121
Overseas Calls 010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs 623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs 661101
Jordan Television 773111
Radio Jordan 774111
Water Authority 680100
Jordan Electricity Authority 815615
Electric Power Company 636381
RJ Flight Information 08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport 08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:
Hussain Medical Centre

813813/32
Khalidi Maternity, 644281/6
Akileh Maternity, 642441/2
Jabal Amman Maternity 642362
Malhas, J. Amman 636140
Palestine, Shmeisani 607071
Shmeisani Hospital 669131
University Hospital 845845
Al-Nuasher Hospital 6672279
The Islamic, Abdali 66612637
Al-Ahli, Abdali 666164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen 77101/3
Al-Bashir, 775111/26
Army, Marka, 891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital 602240/50
Amal Hospital 674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 865199
ZARQA:
ZARQA Govt. Hospital (09)983323
ZARQA National Hospital (09)900560
Jbn Sina Hospital (09)986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital (09)909990
IRBID:
Princess Basma Hospital (02)275555
Greek Catholic Hospital (02)272275
Jbn Al Nafees Hospital (02)247100
AQABA:
Princess Haya Hospital (03)314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. 14-153200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44-532501.

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights
07:45 Larnaca, Damascus (RJ)
08:35 Jeddah (RJ)
08:50 Dubai, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
10:15 Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Abu Dhabi (RJ)
15:00 New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:30 Istanbul (RJ)
17:15 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
17:45 Madrid, Geneva (RJ)
17:50 Frankfurt, Vienna (RJ)
18:10 London, Berlin (RJ)
18:45 Paris, Brussels (RJ)
23:10 Beirut (RJ)
00:05 Cairo (RJ)
05:50 Riyadh (add) (RJ)

Other Flights
05:50 Bucharest (RO)
09:30 Cairo (MS)

09:30 Al 'Arish (Marka Airport) (PF)
10:15 Doha, Al Hudaidah (LY)
10:30 Jeddah (SV)
10:50 Kuwait (KU)
13:10 Tunis (TU)
13:25 Doha, Abu Dhabi (GF)
13:50 Tel Aviv (LY)
15:05 Vienna (OS)
15:30 Algiers (AH)
16:05 Karachi, Abu Dhabi (PK)
20:10 Beirut (ME)
21:10 Paris, Damascus (AF)
22:30 Athens (OA)
23:15 London (BA)
23:30 London, Beirut (BA)
23:35 Amsterdam (KL)

Royal Wings (RW)
07:45 Amman, Damascus (RW)
09:05 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
09:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:20 Tel Aviv (RW)
18:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:20 Amman, Aqaba (RW)
22:50 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)

DEPARTURES

08:25 Amsterdam, New York (RJ)
09:45 Rome (RJ)
10:40 Berlin, London (RJ)
11:00 Istanbul (RJ)
12:15 Jeddah (add) (RJ)
19:30 Colombo (RJ)
19:35 Beirut (RJ)
20:05 Riyadh, Dhahran (RJ)

20:10 Cairo (RJ)
20:15 Bombay (RJ)
20:15 Bahrain, Doha (RJ)
20:30 New Delhi (RJ)
21:00 Calcutta, Bangkok (RJ)
21:15 Dubai, Muscat (AH)
22:45 Sanaa (RJ)
00:40 Riyadh (add) (RJ)

Other Flights

00:35 Amsterdam (KL)
01:55 Bucharest (RO)
06:35 Larnaca (CY)
08:00 Beirut (ME)
08:25 London (BA)
10:30 Cairo (MS)
10:30 Al 'Arish (Marka Airport) (PF)
11:15 Al Hudaidah, Aden (LY)
12:00 Kuwait (KU)
12:00 Jeddah (SV)
14:10 Tunis (TU)
14:20 Shariqah (AH)
15:15 Bahrain, Muscat (GF)
15:10 Tel Aviv (LY)
15:30 Doha (QR)
15:50 Vienna (OS)
19:30 Abu Dhabi, Karachi (PK)
23:55 Damascus, Paris (AF)

Royal Wings (RW)
06:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
08:15 Aqaba (RW)
09:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
16:45 Amman (Marka Airport) (RW)
17:55 Tel Aviv (RW)
20:30 Amman (QAIA) (RW)
21:50 Aqaba (RW)



SOUVENIR FROM AMMAN: Ramadan Haj, right, the owner of a famous kafiyya stall downtown, Tuesday helps a tourist fit a new kafiyya (Photo by Yusef Allan)

Over 200 car accidents attributed to heavy fog

AMMAN (J.T.) — More than 200 automobile accidents in Amman Tuesday were caused by heavy fog that greatly reduced visibility, Jordan Television reported.

At least five people were injured, the media said. Heavy cloud cover and fog also were reported at Queen Alia Airport, but there were no delays in flights, airport officials said.

Meanwhile, the Department of Meteorology Tuesday forecast more scattered showers for today, with cloudy to partly cloudy skies and fog formation on hilly regions, including Amman.

A department official said temperatures will reach a maximum of 12 degrees Celsius during the day and will drop to six at night.

In another development, the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) reported that the recent rains increased the amount of water stored behind the country's dams, which altogether now hold nearly 83,364 million cubic metres (MCM) of water, accounting for 52.1 per cent of the total capacity.

The JVA said the King Talal Dam, the largest in the country, now holds 55 MCM, the Wadi Al Arab Dam holds 10 MCM, Karameh, 14 MCM, Sharhabil, 2.5 MCM, Wadi Shu'eb, almost 1 MCM, and Kafrein, 0.914 MCM.

Last week the dams held only 74 MCM.

Norwegian foreign minister concludes visit

AMMAN (J.T.) — Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk Tuesday concluded a three-day official visit to the Kingdom, during which he held talks with His Majesty King Hussein and reviewed bilateral relations as well as the faltering peace process.

HRH Crown Prince Hassan Monday held talks with Mr. Vollebæk on the latest developments in the peace process and the means of overcoming the obstacles facing it.

Prince Hassan and Mr. Vollebæk underscored the need to exert all possible efforts to put the process back on track to move towards a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region.

Mr. Vollebæk reiterated his country's support for the establishment of a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A number of Norwegian companies are currently carrying out feasibility studies for launching joint investments in Jordan with a capital of \$600 million, he said.

He also emphasised the need for clearing landmines, which he said endanger people.

Ministry announces vocational training statistics, enrollment goals

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Education last year enrolled 43.2 per cent of all male and 22.42 per cent of all female public school students in its vocational training courses and hopes to meet its target of 50 and 35 per cent respectively by the year 2000, according to the director of the ministry's Vocational Training Department.

Mustafa Obeid Tuesday said the ministry has increased the total number of vocational training specialisations to 44, thus giving the students a wide variety from which to choose.

Mr. Obeid said his department this year hopes to open the door for students training in a certain trade to shift to another freely, and to ensure that students who take vocational training courses at the secondary level are able to continue higher studies at the university level.

The department's main target is to ensure that the training offered meets the needs of the local labour market, he said. The department is continually cooperating with local businesses to determine needed specialisations, he added.

In the past year, the ministry transformed 13 secondary academic schools into comprehensive schools offering both academic and vocational training, and opened four new comprehensive schools, according to Mr. Obeid.

The ministry has made plans to construct another 31 comprehensive schools, which are to be financed through a loan from the World Bank, he said, adding that the loan will also be used to expand vocational facilities in 12 existing schools.

According to Mr. Obeid, the department now cooperates with 257 public and private organisations to exchange expertise and views in trade-related fields.

The vocational schools have produced hundreds of thousands of dinars worth of furniture ordered by the Ministry of Education, he said.

Writers association to hold elections for new president, board on Thursday

AMMAN (Petra) — The Jordan Writers Association (JWA) Thursday will hold elections to choose a new president and an eight-member board for the next two years.

The presidency is being contested by six candidates: Mohammad Masalha, Hani Kheir, Mohammad Sufeh, Zakariya Siyani, Yusef Ghazu, and the incumbent president Hani Amad.

According to Mr. Amad, a total of 29 writers are running for board membership, but no blocs have been formed yet.

The new board will have to deal with important issues, such as hosting a meeting by the Arab Writers Association, he added.

He said the new board of the JWA, which was founded in 1987, will have to call for a general assembly meeting to form a special society to deal with JWA housing issues.

Mr. Amad noted that the government recently donated a plot of land in the Shafa Badran district near Amman so that the JWA may build homes for its members.

According to Mr. Amad, 165 out of a total of 200 JWA members have paid their dues and are thus entitled to take part in the election.

Jordan Times Fax
696183

'No arrests have been made' in attack against Iraqi diplomat

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The government Tuesday said no arrests have been made in connection with the armed attack against an Iraqi diplomat in Amman earlier this week.

Acting Minister of State for Information Affairs Nasser Lawzi told reporters that police were still looking into Saturday's attack on Rahim Taher, the commercial attaché at the Iraqi embassy in Jordan since 1995.

"The investigation and search procedures by the concerned authorities to determine the identity of

those responsible for the attack are still under way," he said after the regular Cabinet session.

"No arrests have been made," Mr. Lawzi said, adding that the investigation was still "in its primary stages."

Mr. Taher escaped unhurt after a gunman with a silencer-equipped pistol fired a single shot from a passing purple-coloured Hyundai rental car.

Though Jordan has insisted on dealing with the attack as "an ordinary security incident," Nouri Weiss, Iraqi ambassador to Jordan, has termed it an "assassination attempt."

Mr. Weiss blamed the

attack on "elements that wanted to disturb Iraq's relationship with Jordan." He declined to give further details.

The attack against Mr. Taher, 45, came several weeks after Baghdad's execution of four Jordanians for smuggling spare auto parts out of Iraq.

Jordan strongly condemned the executions, saying they dealt a heavy blow to bilateral ties that had improved slightly after hitting their low in August 1995, when Jordan granted asylum to top Baghdad defectors.

Jordan expelled seven Iraqi diplomats and recalled its chargé d'affaires from Baghdad in

retaliation for the execution.

But days after the assassination, both countries appeared eager to mend fences.

Iraq, Jordan's sole oil supplier, agreed to provide the Kingdom with 96,000 barrels a day in 1998 under an annual protocol renewed last week.

Both countries also exchanged lists of the other's nationals being held prisoner and agreed to discuss other issues linked to bilateral security cooperation.

According to the lists, Jordan has 121 Iraqi detainees and prisoners, while Iraq has 69 Jordanian prisoners.

Relations with Arab states should not suffer from decision to attend exercises — Lawzi

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan's relations with other Arab nations should not be adversely affected by the decision to attend the U.S.-Israeli-Turkish naval exercises, since the Kingdom's role is limited to observing and not participating, the government said Tuesday.

The government's view was conveyed to the media by Acting Minister of State for Information Affairs Nasser Lawzi following a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali.

"The official Jordanian observer has already left Amman to attend the exercises," said Mr. Lawzi, who expressed his belief that the

issue has been blown out of proportion.

"The exercises are restricted and limited to a period of three days. These are merely training exercises and not manoeuvres," according to the minister.

Foreign Minister Fayez Tarawneh Monday said Jordan took a sovereign decision to attend the exercises, codenamed Reliant Mermaid, because "we read them as exercises for search and rescue operations."

In his statement to the press, Mr. Lawzi echoed Dr. Tarawneh's statement, saying that "the other parties had no effect on Jordan's decision to attend as

an observer as it was a sovereign decision. Jordan is not required to discuss this issue with any other party whose views may be different."

Referring to the Cabinet meeting, Mr. Lawzi said the Council of Ministers endorsed the recent 1998 Jordanian-Iraqi agreement on oil purchases and cooperation in oil-related matters.

The Kingdom last week concluded a deal to purchase 4.8 million tonnes of Iraqi oil and oil products at a reduced price.

Under the new agreement, Jordan will buy its crude oil in 1998 at \$16.80 per barrel, down from \$

Opposition urges government to recall observer from trilateral exercises

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The country's vocal Islamist-led opposition urged the government Tuesday to withdraw Jordan's "observer" from controversial military exercises by Israeli, Turkish, and American navies.

The Kingdom's decision to attend the exercises as an observer was against the will of Jordanians, a spokesperson for the 12-member coalition told a news conference.

"We strongly denounce Jordan's participation in the manoeuvres...and demand that it be stopped," Fou'ad Dabour, secretary general of the Arab Ba'ath Progressive Party, told a news conference, surrounded by his other colleagues in the coalition.

"These manoeuvres are a threatening message directed by the three parties against all Arab and Muslim nations," he added.

"Jordan's participation is neither justified nor accepted because the war games give moral, political, and military support to the Zionist entity."

The Monday to Friday exercises in the eastern Mediterranean, code-named Reliant Mermaid, have generated a chorus of criticism at home and abroad.

The Arab League, Iran, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq have all condemned the exercises as posing a threat to the region.

Israel and Turkey have dismissed such claims, saying that the exercises are being focused on search and rescue operations.

Jordan has defended its move, saying it had only sent an observer and was not taking part in the exercises.

Jordanian Naval Forces Commander Rear Admiral Hussein Khasawneh is attending the search and rescue operations.

The manoeuvres, organised under a 1996 Israel-Turkey military cooperation agreement, involve ships, helicopters, and aircraft. Egypt turned down Turkey's invitation to attend the games as an observer.

Mr. Dabour said the coalition, which includes the influential Islamic Action Front (IAF), leftists, and pan-Arab groups, had sent a letter to Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali denouncing Jordan's decision.

"We call upon the government to...refrain from

joining any anti-Arab or anti-Muslim military alliance," he said.

Many Lower House of Parliament members have dismissed as unacceptable the government's justification for taking part in the exercises.

"We feel that there is no benefit whatsoever from Jordanian participation in the manoeuvres and it disturbs us as well," said Deputy Mohammad Oran, member of the Arab Land Party. "This is a new policy that will take Jordan away from the Arab Nation and put it in a new Mediterranean alliance," he claimed.

"The government's explanation that it has sent an observer just to monitor what is happening is not acceptable to us and does not make sense. We hope this will not happen again."

Ross, faced with harder Israeli line, meets Netanyahu, Arafat

(Continued from page 1)

that demanded by the U.S. to jump start peace talks.

The U.S. package centres on what Washington is calling a "significant and credible" troop withdrawal in exchange for a renewed Palestinian crackdown on armed anti-Israel activists to allow the two sides to enter accelerated final-status negotiations.

The far-right National Religious Party (NRP), with nine seats in Mr. Netanyahu's coalition, warned that it would oppose the government if it conducted a pull-back of the size sought by Washington.

Meanwhile, settlers' groups held demonstrations outside the Jerusalem Hotel where Mr. Ross was staying to protest U.S. pressure on Mr. Netanyahu to give ground.

In a sign of the new political atmosphere in Israel, Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, now seen as the

80 per cent of Jordanians still believe Israel is enemy — poll

(Continued from page 1)

Close to 40 per cent of the national sample in Jordan attributed perception of Israelis as the enemy to religious reasons (31.3 per cent from the refugee camps sample, and 24 per cent from the opinion leaders sample), while 29.2 per cent said it was due "to lack of trust in dealings," said the poll.

According to a poll carried out by CSS in August 1994, following the signing of the Washington Declaration between Jordan and Israel ending the 46-year old state of war between the two countries, 80.2 per cent of Jordanians then said they supported the signing of the declaration.

The recent poll shows that 78.9 per cent of the national sample think that Israelis still view Jordanians as enemies as well (82.8 per cent of the refugee camp sample and 77.5 per cent of the opinion makers sample).

Within the opinion leaders sample, 59 per cent of Lower House and Senate members said that cementing Jordanian-Israeli ties would end the "Jordan is Palestine" conspiracy.

The majority of voters (71.6 per cent) and political party leaders (73.3 per cent) within this sample, however, thought that the "Jordan is Palestine" conspiracy would not be erased in Israeli thinking with the enhancement of Jordanian-Israeli ties.

Describing Jordanian-Israeli relations, 47.3 per cent of the national sample said that ties between the two countries were "close." The percentage of the refugee camps sample in this category substantially exceeded that of the opinion leaders (42.8 to 31.9 per cent respectively).

A little over 15 per cent of the national sample said ties could be characterised as "bad." 12.1 per cent of refugee camp residents and 23.1 per cent of the opinion leaders.

A mere 7.8 per cent of the national sample described the relationship between Jordan and Israel as "very close."

Significantly, there seemed to be little discrepancy between various cities in Jordan with regards to attitudes towards Palestinian-Jordanian ties. Cities heavily populated with Jordanians of Palestinian origin held markedly similar views to those overwhelmingly inhabited by east-bankers.

Moreover, the opinion leaders samples consistently showed less optimism with regards to the peace process and Israel than refugee camp residents.

WHAT'S GOING ON

FILM

* Children's film "The Adventures of Spot Sooty & Co. (Splashing Out)" at the British Council, Jabal Amman at 5:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Exhibition of writing arabesque, miniature on silk by Hatouf Hijazi Tabba'a, at the Jordan Arts and Crafts Centre, Jabal Amman, 2nd Circle (Tel. 647858) until Jan. 15.

* Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hamourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 5336098).

* Works by contemporary Arab artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh.

Swedish police arrest over 300 neo-Nazis

STOCKHOLM (AFP) — Swedish authorities will decide Tuesday what to do with 21 foreign neo-Nazis remanded in custody at the weekend when a rock concert organised by "white supremacist" groups, degenerated into violence resulting in more than 300 arrests.

"The prosecutor in charge of the case will look at three videos made by the neo-Nazis and will decide whether they can be used as evidence," Claes Cassel, spokesman for Stockholm police headquarters said Monday.

The films show some of neo-Nazis making the fascist salute and shouting "Sieg Heil" and making disparaging remarks about ethnic minorities, Swedish radio said.

The police arrested 314 young neo-Nazis after fighting broke out at the concert held Saturday night at Brotby in Roslagen district northeast of Stockholm. The concert was organised by neo-fascist groups reported to be close to the neo-Nazi organisation Nordland.

The police swoop, which took in 32 foreigners as well as Swedes, was one of the biggest operations ever carried out in the Swedish capital.

The majority of those

detained were freed early Sunday, but 21 were still being held in custody for resisting arrest and propagating racial hatred, police sources said.

Among those arrested were 32 foreigners; nine Germans, seven Norwegians, six Americans, six Finns, two Britons, one Czech and a Canadian.

Of the 32 foreigners detained, 21 were remanded in custody because they had no fixed address in Sweden, Mr. Cassel said. Swedish judicial authorities said a decision would be made Tuesday about whether to keep the 21 in jail.

The radio said that of the nearly 280 Swedes released after arrest, several are due to appear in court. But the Swedish news agency TT said magistrates wanted to deal first with the non-resident foreigners before the cases involving Swedes.

"The identity of the foreigners was to be kept secret until Tuesday midday at the least (1100 GMT) then it will be up to the court to decide if they can be named," an aide to Mr. Cassel told AFP.

More than 120 riot police intervened at the concert after a public employee was hurt by a flying glass bottle. Swedish police moved swiftly to arrest all those on

the premises in order to prevent further violence.

But clashes ensued as the concert-goers threw beer bottles and other objects and directed fire extinguishers at police. No one was injured in the fracas.

Stockholm chief of police Gunno Gunnmo said his officers seized T-shirts bearing the Nazi swastika emblem and compact discs of "rock vaunting the supremacy of the white race" from the premises.

"We had been informed that the meeting could degenerate," said Mr. Gunnmo, when asked about the police presence on standby at the concert.

"When things started getting out of hand, we immediately drafted in reinforcement," he said.

Around 100 Swedish neo-Nazis held an anti-semitic gathering in November in central Stockholm without being pounced upon by the police.

That gathering, organised by the National Socialist Front and three other Nazi groups, had been banned by authorities. Clashes with demonstrators protesting at the gathering were only narrowly averted.

The police response to the November gathering drew severe criticism from the Swedish Committee against Anti-Semitism.



Visitors line up below a sculpture depicting the People's Revolution to see the Chairman Mao Zedong Memorial Hall and Mausoleum, reopened after a nine month renovation. The memorial hall, which underwent structural and interior repairs houses the embalmed corpse of China's late chairman, and has received more than 110 million visitors since its original opening in May 1977. There is no admission fee (Reuters photo)

Crowds queue for the reopening of Mao's Mausoleum

BEIJING (AFP) — The mausoleum of Mao Zedong, the founder of Communist China, was reopened with great fanfare Tuesday after a nine-month closure for "interior repairs."

Hundreds of tourists queued up in Beijing's famous Tiananmen Square in front of the

huge columned building covered in marble.

"I was born in 1976, the year of his death, I have read loads of books about his life, and they all say that he is the great hero of the Chinese people," said a young woman from Liaoning province in the north east, as she waited patiently in the snaking

queue to view Mao's body.

Two hours after the reopening, an electronic screen announced that 7,000 visitors had already paid homage to the man they call "the Great Helmsman" whose forces threw out the ruling nationalists after a civil war in 1949.

Cambodian resistance threatens to boycott July polls

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — Cambodia's four-party resistance coalition Tuesday threatened to boycott July's scheduled election, accusing the government of perverting the electoral process.

The resistance issued a statement signed by deposed co-Premier Prince Ranariddh and the presidents of the other three political parties in the coalition — Sam Rainsy, Son Sann and Bour Ke.

They were considering withdrawing completely from the vote "if there is a risk that the next elections are designed only to legitimise the illegal and unpopular regime now in place in Phnom Penh," it said.

The resistance, which supports Prince Ranariddh who was effectively ousted last July, accused powerful Second Prime Minister Hun Sen of "perverting" the electoral process by demanding that the prince stand trial on criminal charges.

"Hun Sen, for purely political reasons, seeks to convict Prince Ranariddh for imaginary crimes while the perpetrators of truly real and odious crimes committed during and after last July's coup d'etat are not even identified and will continue to be, in all probability, under the protection

of Hun Sen," the statement said.

It referred to the executions of more than 40 of the prince's supporters following his ouster which U.N. human rights officials have said do not appear to be under investigation despite promises from the government.

The statement, which also attacked Hun Sen for his refusal to consider repeated appeals for a ceasefire and peace talks between the warring factions, was released less than a day after King Norodom Sihanouk abruptly left Phnom Penh, a move believed to signify his anger at recent political developments.

Just before he left, the king, under heavy criticism and threats of violence from Hun Sen and his supporters, backed down on an earlier decision to unilaterally grant a pardon to the deposed prince should he be convicted.

Hun Sen's insistence the Prince Ranariddh stand trial for allegedly illegally importing weapons and colluding with the outlawed Khmer Rouge guerrilla faction has been a major stumbling block in attempts to resolve the crisis.

Should the prince be convicted, he would be ineligible

to stand in the July elections unless he was granted a royal pardon.

The international community, which has said the prince must be allowed to participate for the election to be "free, fair and credible," has pushed for the pardon as a face-saving option for all sides.

In December, King Sihanouk agreed to forgo his usual requirement that pardons must be requested before they are granted. Hun Sen has refused to ask for a pardon but has said he will not oppose one if the prince requests one and thereby admits his guilt but the prince has vowed not to ask for one as he does not recognize the legitimacy of Cambodian courts.

A compromise was believed to have been reached when the king agreed to grant the pardon unilaterally but Hun Sen and his supporters vehemently denounced that decision as illegal and warned of violence if it were implemented.

Faced with such criticism the king backed down and the situation remains unresolved.

The resistance said these facts indicated that the electoral process was becoming more and more perverted by Hun Sen's manoeuvres.

London says no to early freeing of loyalist prisoners in Ulster

BELFAST (AFP) — Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam late Monday turned down a request by Protestant loyalists in Northern Ireland that their jailed colleagues be freed immediately as a gesture of appeasement.

"I think it (the question of the prisoners) is an issue which has to be dealt with," she told journalists near here after a day of talks with members of parties engaged in the peace talks. "But I have to say that after the events of last week, this is not the moment to address it."

Ms. Mowlam was referring to three sectarian killings between Dec. 27 and 31, including two of Catholics by the extremist Loyalist Volunteer Force

(LVF). "I fully accept it has to be addressed at some point, but there are many other issues which equally need addressing," added Ms. Mowlam, whose resignation has been demanded by some Protestant leaders.

Protestants have been exasperated by gestures of conciliation from London and Dublin, co-sponsors of the current peace talks, to try to keep the Irish Republican Army's political wing Sinn Fein in the talks process.

These gestures have included the transfer of IRA prisoners from British to Irish jails and early freeing of IRA detainees from Irish prisons. The Protestants are demanding to be treated on the same footing.

Body of two Filipinos found after tanker explodes in Argentina

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) — Argentina's Coast Guard recovered the bodies of two Filipino crewman who died in an explosion and fire aboard a tanker on the Parana River in Buenos Aires province, officials said Monday.

Monday, rescue teams found the body of Carlos Bano Ross, 22 inside the Bahamas-flagged tanker "Lancer," which exploded and burst into flames Thursday after a powerful series of blasts.

Sunday officials discov-

ered the body of Margarito Maranga, 44, some 60 kilometres from the site of the fire.

The other 31 crew members survived the explosion after abandoning the burning ship.

The vessel was en route to the U.S. port of Houston, Texas, with a stop scheduled in Venezuela. The tanker had been hauling crude oil and grain alcohol. Preliminary reports indicated the explosion took place in the ship's engine room.

British author backs republic for Australia, but not for Britain

SYDNEY (AFP) — Veteran British author and retired barrister John Mortimer, creator of "Rumpole of the Bailey", tied his colours to an Australian republic here Tuesday.

But Mortimer, who is visiting Australia to escape the rigours of the British winter and to give a series of one man shows at the Sydney Opera House, said he still considered the monarchy more appropriate for Britain because he would not be able to stand someone like former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as president.

Asked on ABC Radio what his views were on Australia's current debate about severing its historical link to the British throne, he said: "I'm not for a republic in Britain because I would hate to have a President Thatcher, or President Tebbit or even President Callaghan."

Norman, now Lord Tebbit served as a minister and Conservative Party chairman under Ms. Thatcher and the Labour Party's James Callaghan was her predecessor as premier.

"I think that we are losing touch with our past in England, and I think our past is so bound up with kings and queens and civil wars and so on and I think it is important to keep that

and I don't think they do much harm in England."

"But I honestly don't think they are appropriate for Australia," he added in a comment likely to win him new friends in Australia's republican movement, which is campaigning for an Australian head of state to bring in the new millennium.

Mortimer, 74, who has in the past made no secret of his support for a Britain's New Labour government, also criticised it for being too right-wing.

"What's happening with this government is that they are doing the things that the conservatives would never have dared to do, like reducing single-parent maintenance and talking about reducing disabled people's maintenance."

"I just hope they do some of the labour things which one would associate with a Labour government."

He said it would be awful if it continued on its present path, likening it to Australia's Labour government which lost office in the March, 1996, election. "Somebody's said of Australia that 'we've had 20 years of Thatcherism, half of it imposed by a Labour government.' And we certainly don't want to have that any more."

Authorities kill poacher in northwest China

BEIJING (AFP) — Authorities in northwest China's Qinghai province killed one poacher and arrested 19 others last week after an exchange of gunfire that concluded a two-day manhunt, the China Daily said Tuesday.

The wildlife patrol team — made up of police and officials from Zhiduo county — met "fierce resistance" when it finally tracked down the organised

gang last Monday, it said. Authorities seized six guns, 10,000 bullets and six jeeps belonging to the gang of poachers, who had killed and skinned 40 antelope under state protection.

The remote county, which is rich in animal life, was forced to set up the team after lucrative trade in illegal pelts "incited bands of hunters to turn to poaching," the newspaper said.

Hong Kong protesters fail to be heard by ex-Chinese president

HONG KONG (AFP) — Activists were thwarted in renewed attempts Tuesday to protest during the visit of former Chinese President Yang Shangkun over his role in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

Some 16 supporters of the Alliance in Support of the Patriotic Democratic Movement in China gathered outside the Hong Kong Exhibition and Convention Centre to protest the private visit of Mr. Yang, widely seen as responsible for the military crackdown.

But Mr. Yang, 90, who arrived here on late Sunday for a week's visit failed to show up at a flag-raising ceremony.

The protesters from the alliance, set up to support the 1989 student-led protests in China, were demanding legal action against those responsible for the massacre when

troops fired on unarmed protesters, as well as the release of political prisoners in China.

The group including those from the radical April Fifth movement also staged a sit-in outside Government House, the former residence of British governors, where Mr. Yang attended a luncheon hosted by Chief Executive Tung Chee-Hwa.

But they were carried away in police vans, shouting "Yang Shangkun scams."

Mr. Yang reportedly failed to witness both protests.

His visit is considered by the Hong Kong government as "private" and no details of his activities have been released.

Mr. Yang, who stepped down from his post in 1992, backed late paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in clamping down on the pro-democracy protests.

Bangladesh frontier with India on 'red alert' against rebels

DHAKA (AFP) — Bangladesh put its security forces on "red alert" along its border with India after a leader of an Assam-based separatist group was arrested and charged for illegal trespassing, press reports said Tuesday.

The private Associated Press of Bangladesh (APB) news agency reported that the "red alert" came amid fears the separatist United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) insurgents could infiltrate the country and carry out subversive activities.

India has requested that Bangladesh hand over Anup Jeta, ULFA's secretary general, but the group has reportedly tried to urge the Dhaka government not to extradite him, the agency said. No extradition treaty exists between the two neighbours, but both sides have voiced their commitment to cooperate in drives against insur-

gency by refusing sanctuary to rebels.

ULFA is one of the most active insurgent groups in northeastern India fighting for a separate "homeland" or autonomous status.

APB said the Home Ministry has instructed all security agencies to ensure that no ULFA insurgents enter Bangladesh or undertake subversive activities.

More than 50 insurgents from seven Indian states have been arrested in Bangladesh over the past two years.

Home ministry officials were not immediately available for comment.

Court sources meanwhile said Jeta was produced in a Dhaka court Monday in secrecy and under tight security. He was charged for illegally entering Bangladesh, possessing a false Bangladeshi passport and carrying foreign currency without valid documents.

Crashes prompt review of U.S. Air Force trainer to screen cadets

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The U.S. Air Force Monday ordered a review of its use of a British-made trainer aircraft to screen cadets for careers as pilots following a series of crashes that have killed six people.

The air force acted after a Time magazine article detailed repeated engine failures on the single engine T-3A, made by Slingby Aviation Ltd, calling it "the most dangerous plane to fly in the U.S. Air Force."

"We will not put the aircraft back into service again until we have found what the problems are and, number two, until I am very comfortable and (have) gone up and flown the aircraft," said Air Force General Lloyd Newton.

Since going into service with the U.S. Air Force in 1994, T-3As have experienced engine failure 57 times, nine times while airborne, the air force said.

On three occasions — in 1995, 1996 and 1997 — planes crashed, killing three Air Force Academy cadets and their instructor pilots.

Another engine failure July 25, a month after the last crash, prompted the air force to ground its fleet of 112 T-3As. An investigation concluded that a problem with the plane's fuel system was causing its engines to cut off.

Gen. Newton, commander of air force education and training, said fixing the problem would require 10 modifications to the aircraft, which the air force will carry out at a cost of \$6.2 million.

He said the plane is likely to remain grounded until mid-year.

But the general defended the aircraft, which is capable of performing spins and acrobatic turns, as the right choice to screen prospective air force pilots.

"The aircraft still is, we think, the right kind of aircraft that we want," he said.

The trainer is used by the British and Indian air forces. The Indian air force has experienced similar problems, said Gen. Newton.



Balloonist Dick Rutan (right) talks with crew members Burt Rutan (centre) and an unidentified member in the early morning of Jan. 6 in Albuquerque after plans to launch the Global Hilton balloon were scrubbed late in the previous evening because of a problem with winds across the Atlantic Ocean. The jet stream that would have carried aviator Dick Rutan and partner Dave Melton across the ocean on the first leg of their planned round the world journey had deteriorated, trip officials said. The launch has been postponed for ten days to two weeks (Reuters photo)



Chinese police free kidnapped Taiwanese businessman

BEIJING (AFP) — A Taiwanese businessman kidnapped in south China's Guangdong province has been freed after a police raid on the kidnappers' hideout, the China News Service reported Tuesday.

Police in Huiyang city arrested seven suspects and detained seven others involved in the case after the Dec. 27 raid, which came exactly two weeks after the businessman, surnamed Lin, went missing.

The kidnappers, allegedly led by Chen Yunnan, had demanded \$1 million from the businessman's relatives in Taiwan, the report said.

Police have declared the case the "biggest" kidnapping in provincial history, it said.

According to police, suspects have already admitted they began planning the kidnapping in October 1996.

Mr. Lin, who owns a factory in Huiyang, was grabbed from his car on his way home from work.

Fujimori expresses sorrow to Hashimoto for death of 2 Japanese

LIMA (AFP) — President Alberto Fujimori sent a condolence card to Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, lamenting the "abominable assassination" of two young Japanese tourists in Peru and promising his government would do what it could to punish the crime.

"In the name of the government and people of Peru, I would like to express the most profound sorrow for the death of Japanese citizens Takairo Miyashita and Chiaki Ito, which occurred at the end of October," Mr. Fujimori wrote in a card sent Dec. 29, and publicly released Monday.

"Under these sad circumstances, I can only express the great friendship and gratitude that Peru professes for the Japanese people," Mr. Fujimori wrote.

Ito, 22, and Miyashita, 23, both of Tokyo's Waseda University, were slain on an Amazon River expedition. Their bodies were reportedly hacked to bits.

According to investigators, a group of soldiers, including 15 already arrested, rammed into their motorboat to rob and slaughter them. In late December, Mr. Hashimoto called "totally outrageous" the possibility that the Peruvian military killed the two students.



Atal Behari Vajpayee, the leader of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in a pensive mood during an interview with Reuters in Bombay. Vajpayee hopes to be the next prime minister of India if the BJP wins the forthcoming election (Reuters photo)

New political alliance 'spells death-knell for Indian PM's polls hopes'

NEW DELHI (AFP) — The launch of a rival alliance of Indian centrist parties has spelled the death-knell for Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's hopes of reelection at the head of a new coalition government, the main opposition party said Tuesday.

The Hindu Nationalists, tipped to retain its position as India's largest parliamentary party in upcoming elections, said the new grouping would play directly into their hands.

They argued the Jan Morcha (People's Front) alliance, a loose alliance of parties from several regions launched Monday, would split the liberal vote which had helped Mr. Gujral's coalition to power and would lead to a Hindu nationalist government.

K.L. Sharma, a spokesman for the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, Indian People's Party), said: "We will gain from such a move in the February-March polls."

He dismissed the new grouping as no more than a collection of breakaway factions formerly part of Mr. Gujral's United Front minority coalition.

"This move will result in dividing votes among themselves," he said. "This is sure to land them in a mess... there will be no hope for both the United Front and the new alliance."

India goes to the polls from Feb. 16. The results are due to be announced by March 12 after voting staggered over four days across the subcontinent. Analysts are predicting another hung parliament.

Mr. Gujral's United Front minority coalition was toppled in November.

A loose collection of left-wing, centrist and regional parties, it was hastily formed to fill a vacuum after the BJP and the Congress, India's oldest party, failed to form a coalition after 1996 elections.

Meanwhile the Congress, which backed Mr. Gujral for 18 months to keep the BJP out of power, is now hoping to ally itself to the newly-founded People's Front.

Ved Prakash, a Congress spokesman, predicted its launch would kill off the United Front coalition. "We are sure that the days of United Front are over," he said.

The power behind the new People's Front is Laloo Prasad Yadav, a former president of Mr. Gujral's own party.

Mr. Yadav was forced to resign last year because of corruption charges.

He is currently out on bail but his continuing influence in the eastern state of Bihar has led to him being courted by most major parties looking for pre-poll alliances.

Analysts say Laloo Prasad Yadav's new grouping could play a key role in deciding who wins around 150 of India's 545 parliamentary seats.

Researchers identify gateway for HIV

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Researchers say they have identified the gateway that the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) uses to make its deadly penetration into human cells.

In a report published in the Journal of Virology, scientists from the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Centre in New York say they zeroed in on a discrete region of the CCR5 co-

receptor that the AIDS virus attaches to.

The report also says that a mutation of that particular spot on CCR5 prevents the fusion of the virus and may give researchers some hope of finding a cure.

"This report is another piece to the puzzle of how HIV infects immune system cells," said Tatjana Dragic, a research scientist and lead author of the report.

"We had previously shown that CCR5 was a co-receptor for HIV, and other studies have shown that mutations in CCR5 can confer resistance to HIV. The data reported here brings us one step closer to understanding the precise role of CCR5 in the HIV infection process," she said.

"We hope that this knowledge will allow for the development of novel therapeutics," she added.

Clinton says he liked controversial beach photo

WASHINGTON (AFP) — U.S. President Bill Clinton Monday said the media had overstepped their bounds when they photographed and videotaped him and his wife dancing arm-in-arm on a Caribbean beach.

At the same time, Clinton said he liked the results "quite a lot."

The incident took place on the island of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands, where Mr. Clinton, First Lady Hillary Clinton and their daughter, Chelsea, spent several vacation days.

A still photographer for Agence France-Presse and a team from the NBC television network captured the first couple — he shirtless and in swim trunks and she in a one-piece bathing suit — dancing at Mogens Bay, apparently unaware of the lenses trained on them.

The photo appeared Monday in the main news section of the Washington Post and on the front page of the Los Angeles Times.

Asked whether the photo was a violation of his privacy, Mr. Clinton, who returned to Washington Sunday, said: "Yes."

Informed that reviews of the photograph were gener-

ally positive, Mr. Clinton continued: "Actually, I liked it quite a lot. But I didn't think I was being photographed."

He declined to specify limits beyond which the press was out of line, saying that it was up to the media to establish their own boundaries.

For his part, White House spokesman Michael McCurry said he was unhappy with the photo and suggested that the White House might take additional measures to further shield Mr. Clinton from the press.

Asked if he was angry, Mr. McCurry said: "I am. The president, obviously, is not. But I am."

"It's a very nice picture, but it's obviously a private moment," he said. "I think the president and the first lady are entitled to private moments."

"This was a private place and was not in public," he added.

Mr. McCurry said Mr. Clinton "has long ago given up any sense that there is any privacy in the White House. And you know, he just has to live with what he's put through by all of you."

Prosecutors want death for second Oklahoma City bomber

DENVER, Colorado (AFP) — Jurors began to debate Monday whether a former soldier convicted of planning the deadliest act of terrorism on U.S. soil, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, should get the death penalty.

Attorney Pat Ryan of Oklahoma City said Terry Nichols should die for deliberately taking part in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah federal building, which left 168 people dead and wounded some 600.

"A sentence of life (in prison) would be simply unconscionable," he told the seven-woman, five-man panel earlier following the defence's final plea for clemency.

The jury were to decide, probably by later Tuesday, whether Mr. Nichols — who was convicted of conspiring to blow up the building but found not guilty of first-degree murder — should die by lethal injection or get life in prison.

If sentenced to death, Mr. Nichols, 42, would join his former army buddy Timothy McVeigh — found guilty last year

of carrying out the attack — on death row.

Mr. Ryan strongly opposed the defence's argument that U.S. District Judge Richard Matsch — rather than the jury — should deliver the verdict.

Judge Matsch had told the jury that he could impose a sentence of life in prison if the jurors determined he should decide Mr. Nichols' fate.

Earlier, Mr. Nichols' defence attorney Michael Tigar had said Judge Matsch should render a verdict, not the jury, which he suggested could be improperly swayed by emotional testimony by victims' relatives.

"I feel as though I'm standing before you and trying to sweep back a tide of anger, grief and vengeance," said Mr. Tigar.

During the sentencing phase of the trial jurors openly sobbed on hearing 55 prosecution witnesses describe the suffering they have endured since the blast.

Heartbroken mothers talked about losing their babies, sisters cried over

lost siblings and children told the jury what it is like to grow up without one or both parents.

The jury on Dec. 23 found Mr. Nichols guilty of planning the bombing and guilty of involuntary manslaughter in the deaths of eight law-enforcement officers on duty in the building that day.

But in a decision that stunned the victims' families and survivors of the blast, Mr. Nichols was found not guilty of actually bombing the building and not guilty of first-degree murder.

Mr. Tigar also sought to undermine testimony against Mr. Nichols — whom he described as a devoted family man — from a star prosecution witness who took the stand in exchange for a reduced sentence for his role in the attack.

Mr. Tigar pointed out that Michael Fortier was not facing the death penalty although he and Mr. McVeigh checked out the Murrah building five months before it was bombed.

Earlier, prosecutor Beth Wilkinson had also

demanding the death penalty for Mr. Nichols, charging that he "did not care who lived or who died" and deliberately took part in planning the bombing.

"The just sentence is death," she said.

The defence maintained that Mr. Nichols' role in the conspiracy was minor but Ms. Wilkinson told the jury: "We submit to you that Terry Nichols is a major participant in the conspiracy."

She said that in the fall of 1994 he bought or stole materials used in the bombing and helped Mr. McVeigh, 29, stash a getaway car just three days before the attack.

She also emphasised that there is no basis for a claim that Mr. Nichols was under duress or substantial threat. "No one forced Terry Nichols to agree to the bombing," Ms. Wilkinson said.

Instead, she said, he quit a good job and sent his family away in the fall of 1994 to help Mr. McVeigh — who has appealed the decision against him — with the plan to bomb the Murrah building.

The U.S. will 'work closely' with Kenyan president

WASHINGTON (AFP) — The United States will "work closely" with newly reelected president Daniel Arap Moi, the White House said Monday.

White House spokesman Michael McCurry said at a briefing that while the vote was "fraught with some complications," Washington is convinced it "led to the election of a democratic government."

"We intend to work closely with that government. We have a number of pending issues with the government of Kenya. We intend to pursue them and, we hope, pursue them successfully with President Moi," Mr. McCurry said.

Kenya's presidential and local elections on Dec. 29 and 30 were marked by serious logistical problems, and the election victory by Mr. Moi's Kenya African National Union party has been clouded by accusations of vote-rigging.

Mr. Moi, 73, who has been in power for 19 years, was sworn in Monday to a new five-year term.

Toddler dies stuck in washing machine

HONG KONG (AFP) — A two-year-old boy died after being found unconscious inside a washing machine at his home here Tuesday, a police spokesman said.

The boy was found upside down in the washing machine by his grandmother who had fallen asleep while looking after him in their apartment on the 24th floor of a Kowloon housing estate.

The boy died after being rushed to hospital.

Police are investigating how the boy got into the washing machine.

Tension between Mexican army, peasants still high in Chiapas

LA REALIDAD, Mexico (AFP) — Tension remained high in this impoverished jungle area Monday even after soldiers ended weekend patrols around two towns controlled by leftist rebels.

Army manoeuvres near two bastions of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) — the jungle towns of La Realidad and Nuevo Guadalupe Tepeyac — frightened peasants already shaken by a Dec. 22 massacre of 45 Mayas.

The manoeuvres had fanned rumours of military action, a violation of cease-fire agreements between the rebels and the government.

In Mexico City, Zapatista supporters blocked the entrance to Mexico's stock market early Monday to protest the weekend manoeuvres.

Dozens of demonstrators, some wearing scarves to conceal their identities, prevented trading from starting at 8:30 a.m. (14:30 GMT), said market spokesman Octavio Orozco.

Trading began at 9:15 a.m. (15:15 GMT), he said, as the protest continued outside.

Zapatista supporters also commandeered two hours radio stations Pulsar FM and Radioactiva to transmit messages of support to the impoverished southern state of Chiapas, where the EZLN is quartered.

Calm appeared to have returned to the region by Monday.

Soldiers had left the area Sunday but the military acknowledged in a statement that troops had pursued armed Zapatistas near La Realidad. The rebels escaped but the soldiers seized a small weapons cache.

General Florencio Raul Cuevas, head of the army unit at La Realidad, said Monday the chase was the result of a chance encounter between the two sides.

The soldiers were not planning to swoop down on the rebel stronghold or to capture the EZLN's charismatic masked leader, Subcomandante Marcos, according to Cuevas.

The general said peasants informed the military early Saturday that "armed individuals" were at large in the area.

Patrolling soldiers spotted nine armed men wearing black cloths to hide their faces, and after giving chase, found the encampment with the arms cache.

Marcos, who has made public appearances in La Realidad, has not been seen since the events Saturday.

Meanwhile, the vicar of San Cristobal de Las Casas, Gonzalo Iruarte, called for a period of reflection that would lead up to "a serene, effective dialogue for peace."

Iruarte, who was the

Colombian officials look into drug trafficker checks to prominent people

BOGOTA (AFP) — Colombia's justice department will investigate 10,000 checks written by Cali drug cartel leaders to "prominent people in various sectors," department officials said Monday.

Deputy Attorney General Jaime Cordoba said his office was studying the 10,000 checks to establish links between the drug traffickers and prominent Colombians.

And Mr. Cordoba stressed that the justice department had called several bank employees and managers to explain how the money — totalling billions of pesos — travelled through Colombia's banking system.

Colombian prosecutors — who have found a total of 42,000 such checks — have been looking into dozens of people allegedly tied to the cocaine trade as part of a case known here as Trial 8,000.

The most prominent person tied to Trial 8,000, President Ernesto Samper, was found not guilty in June 1996 by Congress of charges that he accepted \$6 million from traffickers to fund his 1994 run for office.

Former Samper ministers Horacio Serpa — a widely popular presidential candidate — and Rodrigo Pardo — Colombia's ambassador to France — were also

absolved of charges they hid illegal contributions from drug cartels.

Some 23 lawmakers of Samper's Liberal Party and the opposition Conservatives have been linked to Trial 8,000, and several have been jailed on orders of Colombia's supreme court.

Several politicians admitted they received funds from the Cali cartel's top bosses, the now-jailed brothers Gilberto and Miguel Rodriguez Orejuela.

Some analysts say they hope that Colombia's political class "has learned its lesson" ahead of legislative elections in March and a presidential contest in May.

Jordan Times

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Define appropriate action

THE LATEST debate in the Upper House of Parliament about media accuracy and credibility and what measures to take against journalists who err suggests that media hunting season is not over yet.

After a year of media bashing that witnessed the birth of a new press and publications law and the closure of most independent weekly newspapers, the Senate was not completely satisfied, so it seems. Our most senior lawmakers were not content with all the restrictions and fines that the different laws, including the penal code, impose on journalists. At their Monday session, the senators went beyond what the law prescribes and entered into its "new" House regulations an article that gives its speaker the authority to take whatever "appropriate action" he/she deems necessary in a case that involves "distorted media coverage."

The House did not prescribe what "appropriate action" its speaker could take in that event. But the regulation brought back to the minds of journalists the measures that were taken less than two weeks ago. The House secretariat then decided to restrict the movement of journalists inside the Parliament building, a measure that the journalists rightly described as unbefitting of the House, which represents the people and upholds the principles of democracy and freedom of expression.

While we respect the right of any party to take the "appropriate action" — within the limits of the law — to defend itself against any media distortion of its image, we cannot condone arbitrary measures that run counter to the spirit of democracy and respect for freedom of expression. We, therefore, expect the lawmakers, whether in the Lower or Upper House, to recognise and enshrine in their rules that the only appropriate action that they or their speaker can take is to petition the judiciary in accordance with the laws of the land. A true democracy is one in which all the estates of power — the legislative, the executive and the judiciary — function in a transparent manner and the media plays the role of informing the people of what is happening behind closed doors. When conflicts arise, everyone should resort to the courts.

Meanwhile, the media will find it very difficult to fulfil its function if it continues to be pushed around or threatened with "appropriate action." And lawmakers should be at the forefront of defence of the media and its role.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Arab Al Yawm's Taher Adwan said the terrorists who have been committing horrible crimes in Algeria chose the beginning of the Holy Month of Ramadan in which to expose to the world their ugly face by slaughtering unprecedented numbers of Algerian women and children. These terrorists who claim to be Islamists and followers of the Islamic faith are, through their acts, massacring the Islamic religion itself and proving to the world that they are the real enemies of the Islamic Nation, said the writer. These massacres in Algeria have exceeded the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and all the world's dictators' barbaric actions throughout history. Adwan said. He said the governments of the Islamic World bear responsibility for preventing similar crimes from being committed in their countries and should realise that unemployment, poverty, lack of freedom, as well as corruption and despair might drive irresponsible elements in society to follow the path of crime.

Al Aswaq's Rashid Hassan demanded that the government link the cost of living index to wages in the public and private sectors alike. Hassan said Jordanians noticed that prices are hiked continually but no increases in wages or salaries are made to match them. In most countries wages are linked to the cost of living, something which offers workers security and psychological satisfaction but in Jordan chaos prevails, with no rules to control the increase in the prices of almost everything and with no limit to the greed of traders and merchants whose victims are the limited income groups, according to the writer. He said some organisations and firms adopt a salary scale and a system of giving increments; others depend on the whims and moods of the boss, who decides on the annual increments; and others completely disregard the rights of the employees to annual increments. The writer said that if the government conducted a survey on salary increases it would find that the majority of workers have not received any increments for years. He said the government and the Federation of Trade Unions should take steps towards addressing this unbalanced situation.

Washington Watch

By Dr. James Zogby

Top stories of '97 and the struggle for Middle East peace in '98

THE UNITED States remains the world's only superpower with responsibilities and interests from south Asia to the Middle East, from Russia to Bosnia and from Africa to Central and South America. Yet surveys of several year-end polls show Americans have turned inward, demonstrating little or no concern for most foreign policy issues.

Never before has the world been so interdependent, connected by the Internet, trade and global capital markets. Yet, never before have Americans demonstrated such a lack of interest for world developments.

Americans are more satisfied and complacent than at any time in this century. The Pew Research Centre, which has been polling public satisfaction since the 1960s, shows that 47 per cent of Americans are highly contented with their lives. This represents an increase of 20 per cent from a low of 27 per cent satisfaction in the Bush era. Other polls show an equal or better amount saying that Americans are economically better off than at any other time.

Consequently, the public's interest, not only in foreign affairs but also in political issues in general, has diminished, with less than 19 per cent of Americans indicating that they closely follow any news of any type. In fact, the only story followed by more than one-half of the U.S. in 1997, was the death of Princess Diana.

Of the top 10 stories that grabbed the public's attention in 1997, none were domestic policy questions. Only one was a foreign policy issue, that being the confrontation with Iraq over U.N. inspections. Most significant is that the Iraq story was the only foreign policy issue listed among the top 40 stories of the year.

The other top 10 stories after the death of the princess were mostly human interest reports, such as the birth of septuplets in Iowa, the hamburger meat recall, or tragedies like the devastation of the northwest of the United States by floods and the mass suicide of the Heaven's Gate cult members. Also among the most closely followed stories of the year were several court trials: O.J. Simpson, the Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh and the British air pilot accused of murder.

It is interesting to note that domestic policy questions only ranked among the second group of 10 top stories. Moreover, all of these involved issues that affect the per-

sonal financial well-being of Americans: Social security reform (#13), reform of the tax system (#16) and the debate over Medicare/healthcare reform (#19).

Analysts have proposed a number of reasons for the decided shift in the public's thinking, principal among them is the end of the cold war. The dramatic end of the Soviet Union not only removed a competing threat from the world scene, but it reduced the importance, in the minds of Americans, of regional conflicts which now have become viewed as local affairs that no longer threaten to provoke world conflict.

At the same time, Americans are today beneficiaries of a rapidly expanding economy that is creating millions of new jobs and greater economic security. Some Americans are, in fact, negatively impacted by the shifts in the U.S. economy, but with 60 per cent of all Americans saying that they were better off in 1997, than in the previous year, it is clear that a degree of complacency has set in.

Americans have continued to lose faith in politics and politicians. Not only do fewer Americans follow the news; fewer vote and fewer participate in elections, seeing them as partisan games dominated by bigger and bigger money interests. In addition, Americans have become increasingly skeptical about the honesty of politicians. Office seekers have promised change, but have not delivered. They attack one another, reducing the public's belief in both the political parties and in the political process as a whole.

All these trends point to a disturbing reality for those of us concerned about the Middle East and U.S.-Arab relations. It is true that, when asked, most Americans support a balanced approach to the Arab-Israeli peace process and favour the creation of a Palestinian state. However, at the same time, the large majority of Americans do not follow issues in the Middle East, except when the United States is directly involved, as in the case of Iraq. For example, the tension over Hebron and the bombings in Jerusalem were the only other Middle East stories closely followed by Americans in 1997. But they were only followed by 12 per cent of the public and ranked 58 and 60 among those stories closely watched last year.

Because of this lack of overall public interest and investment in these

vital issues of concern, small but powerful ideological and well-organised groups wield undue influence in the shaping of public policy.

It is for this reason that a group of Republican congressmen could write to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last month, pledging their "support for your government in its efforts to resist pressures to cede even larger portions of Judea and Samaria to the Palestinian Authority." They urged Netanyahu "not to be swayed by the empty threats" from the Clinton administration, pledging that Congress will back him in any conflict.

The only reason that members of Congress would display such brazenness is that they are convinced that most Americans will never know of their actions and believe that their personal political interests are served by such behaviour.

The factors that may contribute to changing this disturbing situation in 1998 are: continued Arab resistance to Netanyahu's intransigence, which presents U.S. policymakers with a challenge to which they must respond; the growing and increasingly public division within the U.S. Jewish community, which is pushing both the administration and some in Congress to apply pressure on the Netanyahu government; and the efforts of Arab Americans to challenge the administration, Congress and public opinion about the just requirements for Middle East peace.

Should Netanyahu continue to resist implementation of the peace accords and should the Clinton administration become directly and publicly engaged in pressuring Israel to redeploy its troops and make good on its commitments, the U.S. public will begin to focus on these issues. When a U.S. president becomes publicly and personally involved in an issue and when the honour of the United States is at stake, the public usually follows.

The struggle for Middle East peace in 1998 will not only be between Israelis and Palestinians, between the Clinton administration and the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, it must also be a struggle to engage segments of the U.S. public in this debate. To do this will deny Israeli intransigence and its supporters (in Congress) their most potent weapon — an apathetic public.

U.S. determined to haul peace talks back on track

By George S. Hishmeh

WASHINGTON — The Clinton administration has kept a stiff upper lip in the face of the Israeli cabinet crisis following the resignation this week of Foreign Minister David Levy, a development that could, down the road, still pose a serious challenge to the stalled Middle East peace process and the longevity of the ailing government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

The announcement that U.S. Middle East Peace Coordinator Dennis Ross was to travel to Israel and Gaza on Jan. 6 — a day later than originally scheduled — signalled U.S. determination to pursue the peace process regardless of the consequences of the defection of a senior cabinet member from the ranks of the Netanyahu government and of earlier Israeli pleas that Ross postpone the trip.

The slim vote of confidence Netanyahu won (58-52) from the Knesset over the budget (\$57.5 billion) came as a much needed shot in the arm. U.S. officials acknowledged, although some Israeli watchers here said they would not be surprised if general elections are held sometime this year.

The first sign of the U.S. administration's no-nonsense approach came in the announcement, on the same day that Levy announced his much-threatened resignation, from President Clinton's vacation headquarters in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

It said the American president will be meeting, as planned, with Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Yasser Arafat separately and in Washington on Jan.

20 and 22 respectively — an indication in the opinion of U.S. officials here that the administration was not going to be sidetracked by the political turmoil in Israel. These two dates were actually later than the ones chosen originally.

The U.S. irritation with Israel's foot-dragging was evident in the tone of the statement issued on Monday before the Knesset vote. It said: "The peace process continues. This is a process about peace and not about people. And the U.S. government believes it needs to move forward based on what it thinks is best, and not based on the particular makeup of a particular government at a particular time."

James Rubin, the State Department spokesperson, stressed that the United States will be expecting from Netanyahu when he comes here "a significant and credible and significant further redeployment." Levy's defection, the second since Netanyahu's election 19 months ago, came nine months after the impasse in the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations that followed the building of a Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem.

He, along with Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, were understood to have supported a plan for "a meaningful withdrawal" from the West Bank, unlike the hawkish suggestions of National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon. (Under the Mordechai plan, Israel will retain 55 per cent of the West Bank, while Sharon's proposal calls for Palestinian bantustans limited to about 35 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territory). As a result of Levy's

departure, precipitated by differences over social policy and, to a lesser extent, over the stalled peace process, the crisis-ridden Israeli prime minister will henceforth be more dependent on right-wing hawks and religious coalition hardliners in the cabinet. This should make it more difficult for Netanyahu to deliver what the American administration, if not the Palestinians, expect in redeployments alone in the West Bank.

Speculation was rife in Israel about who will take over the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Levy, who has now declared his intention to challenge Netanyahu for the top position in the forthcoming national elections. The litmus test for what may be expected from the weakened Israeli government was offered by Maariv's respected writer Yosef Lapid, who said, if Netanyahu takes over the foreign ministry "he may intend on moving the peace process forward" but if he offers the portfolio to Sharon, "it's a sign that the process will stop."

To date, the Americans have reportedly been urging Arafat to write down a specific measurable plan for how he will deal with the extremist Palestinian elements in order to silence Israeli agitation about "compliance with those obligations that the Palestinians promised." In return, the U.S. was reported seeking an Israeli withdrawal from about 10 to 14 per cent of the West Bank. A "probationary period" of a few months will be specified before the withdrawal actually takes place.

If the U.S. is successful in this approach, an agree-

ment on accelerated final status talks and a "time-out" on Israeli settlements will be announced at the upcoming White House meetings which some hope will result in a summit of the three leaders.

U.S. mediator Ross is hoping to work out the final details of this American plan during his talks this week with both Arafat and Netanyahu. His trip follows the unsuccessful effort last month by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to have the Israeli leader produce a blueprint for a new Israeli troop pullback from the West Bank in order to break the deadlock that started in March when Israel began building a new settlement in an Arab neighbourhood in Jerusalem.

While the U.S. is at present focusing on the crisis engulfing the crippled Israeli government, the Clinton administration has its eyes as well on the events unfolding in Turkey and Iran, and certainly Iraq.

If the Clinton administration appears eager to start the ball rolling in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, it is likewise hoping to reactivate not in the too distant future the Syrian-Israeli track. The visit of a senior American Congressman — Senator Arlen Specter — to Damascus, and the reported plans by Congressman Tom Lantos to visit Tehran are among the crucial tests facing Albright's stewardship of the State Department, a year old.

The writer is a retired USIS editor who now lives in Washington. He contributed this article to the Jordan Times.

The 'patriotic traitor'

By Haim Baram

ISRAEL IS an ideal country for political commentators and opinionated columnists. One is never short of interesting items, and real sensations have become commonplace, almost mundane. But supporters of the political opposition are no longer interested. The zeal for change, the energy for reform, the desire to influence events and dictate policy have gone. Self-pity has become fashionable, accompanied by vague dreams about finding refuge in a better country.

Better-off Israelis are not necessarily in love with the Middle East. Indeed, many now live in the U.S., and rumours of famous Israelis secretly buying property in Europe are rife. This is not a solution for the majority, of course, not even for the bulk of the Labour-Meretz voters. These people have seen the collapse of their dream of clinching peace agreements with the Palestinians and Syrians without paying too much for them. For the essence of Oslo was the realisation on the part of Israel's educated stratum that Yasser Arafat was prepared to grant Israel peace and legitimacy in return for less than the entire territory captured in June 1967, and that the Golan Heights, also conquered in 1967, could secure peace with Syria. These agreements would have assured Arab recognition of Israel and at least a de facto acceptance of the country's gains in the 1948-9 war.

But the dream has been completely undermined by Netanyahu. Which is why they hate him so much. Not only did he abort Oslo, his twisted policies will force Israel to pay much more in the future. Herein lies the rationale behind the orchestrated campaign against the prime minister, whose latest manifestation is the sensational expose of his wife's endless mishaps and shortcomings. The recent failure of Flotilla 13 in Lebanon and the Mossad in Jordan have deepened the gloom.

Like most Zionist phenomena, the elite IDF units and the Mossad were created by the Labour movement, just as the kibbutzim or the ostensibly egalitarian welfare funds. They were manned by trusted members of the ill-defined but very clearly established inner circle. Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, handed former Irgun terrorists from the Mossad but admitted members of the Stern Gang, such as Yitzhak Shamir. Flotilla 13, the legendary naval command unit, has been based for years on volunteers from the Labour kibbutz movement. Only in the last decade has there been a conspicuous change in this trend, with elite units now admitting religious-nationalist soldiers affiliated to the National Religious Party and the settlers. This gradual transformation is destined to affect recruitment to Mossad. It will take time, but the process is unavoidable and irreversible.

Yehuda Gil is a case in point. He joined Mossad in 1970, and for the last 20 years has been feeding the organisation with false information on the allegedly belligerent intentions of the Syrian regime against Israel. Most Israeli newspapers have reported that his information led the Labour government of 1992-6 to abandon its plans to proceed with the negotiations with President Assad. This determination is highly superficial and even dangerous.

It is also a very convenient excuse for Shimon Peres' failure to pursue

the "only deal in town" namely to withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for full peace with Syria, including diplomatic relations. The truth is that Peres was so fearful of alienating public opinion after the assassination of Rabin in November 1995 that he preferred the long and gradual process with the Palestinians so he could get away with postponing the withdrawal from Syrian territory, which would have necessitated the immediate evacuation of the Golan settlements. Peres' cynical attempt to mollify the centrist vote brought about the massive bombings in Lebanon in April 1996 which cost him thousands of Arab votes and perhaps led to his election defeat on May 29.

But Gil's contribution was significant. The veteran Mossad operative, who maintained his contacts with his semi-imaginary Syrian opposite for years, provided decision-makers with alarming reports about Assad's malicious intentions. Some of his stories (which as he now confesses were falsified deliberately) almost led to skirmishes with Syria which could have exploded into a real war.

The Israeli media sensationalised the reports about the Mossad's failure to assess Gil's reports in time but largely neglected the far more important ideological issue. Four years ago Gil temporarily retired from the agency and became the organisational secretary of the extreme right-wing party Moledet. Led by former General Rehavam Ze'evi, Moledet's basic creed is the removal of the Palestinians from the entire "Land of Israel."

Gil's association with such lunatic views did not prevent Mossad chiefs from redrafting him. This openly fascist Israeli, who had joined the most radical right-wing party as a leading activist, and expressed his blatant opposition to any accommodation with the Arabs in general and Syria in particular, was regarded as "one of us" by the Mossad's highest echelons.

Gil acted as a traitor, deliberately misleading his bosses and his government, and risking the lives of many Israelis by making an unnecessary war more probable. This itself caused great shockwaves. Are "patriotic" right-wingers like Gil capable of being disloyal to the state of Israel to the point of treason?

Gil tried to save his dwindling Mossad career by inventing his Syrian agent, but his reports had an unambiguous slant. Like many right-wing extremists, his loyalty was reserved for the land, not the state. Israel as a state means, at least in theory, the necessity to observe international obligations and respect for the rule of law. But the wild expansionism of people like Gil negates such values by definition. His act of treason is therefore structural and not accidental.

Many West Bank rabbis and political leaders threaten violence even against Israeli troops if the legal government of Israel decides to withdraw from occupied territory. Gil, who told his Mossad colleague Gad Shimron that "not even one Arab wants peace with us, the only solution is transferring them across the border," is loyal only to his special interpretation of what Zionism is all about. People like him love the land (providing that it is "clean" of Arabs) and abhor the legal structures of the state that by definition impose limitations on their extreme vision.

Middle East International

Wouldn't it be nice if...?

By Gwynne Dyer

"It is not an event, it is an item of news."
Talleyrand, on hearing of Napoleon's death, 1821.

EVERY YEAR brings lots of news, but it also brings some real events. Some are disasters, but real events can also be good news.

The odds on the various surprises that may await us in 1998 cannot be calculated precisely, but wouldn't it be nice...

1) ...if Israelis and Palestinians made peace?

The odds on this have just got much better. The coalition government of hard-line Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the biggest obstacle to peace, is in deep trouble. "This is a government on a flight to nowhere," said Foreign Minister David Levy, who, after threatening to resign six times in the past 18 months, finally bit the bullet and quit on Sunday. The straw that broke the camel's back was the Netanyahu's proposed (now approved) 1998 budget which gives more money to the premier's (mostly 'Oriental' Jewish) supporters and the deadlocked peace process. But with the defection of Levy and four other centrist Geshet Party deputies, Netanyahu still has other hurdles to clear while trying to keep his coalition government in one piece.

2) ...if everybody signed the treaty banning anti-personnel mines, including the U.S., Russia, and China?

President Boris Yeltsin has said that Russia will sign it as soon as it can find the money to pay for destroying all the landmines laid along its borders.

U.S. President Bill Clinton will sign it if he can find a quiet year when there's not a lot of other controversial defence traffic (like NATO expansion) trying to squeeze through the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (prop. Jesse Helms).

China will sign it as soon as it democratises (see no. 7).

3) ...if Russia finally started to recover economically?

The Asian financial crisis ended hopes for a Russian recovery this year. "Guilty by association" means that foreign investors are fleeing all the emerging markets, and doubling the interest rate has not saved Russia from the general panic.

Besides, Yeltsin is preparing yet another swerve of policy in order to preserve his personal power. (Communist) Party slogans have been replaced by macro-economic slogans, he said last month, implicitly condemning Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, the regime's leading economic reformer, as a preliminary to firing him.

4) ...if Africa stopped disappointing everybody, and especially Africans?

Maybe it already has. The fall of Zaire's dictator Mobutu in July was the latest triumph of the 'new breed' leaders who have taken power in Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Rwanda in the past decade. Their strategy is good governance now, and (they promise) democracy later.

Even U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recently described Africa's "strong new leaders" as "beacons of hope" — and even if the current crop of would-be saviours of Africa fail, the principle is now clearly understood. Marxism cannot save Africa.

The International Monetary Fund cannot save Africa. Foreign aid cannot save Africa. Only Africans can save Africa.

5) ...if Iran and the United States finally made up?

It could happen, for new Iranian President Mohammed Khatami, elected by an overwhelming majority vote last year, has called for a "thoughtful dialogue" with the "great American people." Reports last week that Senator Tom Lantos was planning to travel to Tehran as a special presidential envoy were not comprehensively denied.

On the other hand, both presidents are hampered by powerful domestic interests that will try to thwart any rapprochement. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei went on national TV in Iran on Jan. 2 to warn that "some faction...or even the government, has a tendency towards reconciliation with the West or America." Clinton's ayatollahs have media access too, so this one is a long shot.

6) ...if Iraq's Saddam Hussein meets his demise this year?

Not very likely. Saddam Hussein is in fairly good health. He has been responsible for several million other Iraqis suffering early death, imprisonment, and/or torture (in a country with a total population of only 20 million), so he also faces some risk of being assassinated, but dozens have tried and dozens have failed.

7) ...if China democratised?

It won't be fast or easy, and it may not succeed at all, but we may start to see movement on this front towards the end of 1998.

There is a deep split between those leaders who believe that the party could liberalise, exploit the obedient rural vote to win a free election, and hang onto power for a generation, and those who think any relaxation of the totalitarian controls means revolution and disintegration. Nobody was going to rock the boat in the first 18-24 months after Deng Xiaoping's death last February, but that period expires late this year.

8) ...if some major disease were eradicated?

India conducted a mass immunisation programme last year to wipe out the last reservoirs of polio. If there are no new polio cases in the world by the end of this year, it is probably extinct.

On the other hand, a virulent new variant of influenza has appeared in Hong Kong, and there are alarming reports of some new kind of haemorrhagic fever in Kenya.

9) ...if peace broke out in Sri Lanka, in Northern Ireland, and in Algeria?

Respectively: a small chance, a rapidly dwindling chance, and no chance at all.

10) ...if Europe united?

It will, at the end of this year. More precisely, about half of Europe's population, living in the 15 members of the European Union, will adopt a common currency next January 1st. Not quite the United States of Europe, but you can't run a common currency for long without a single policy on most economic issues. The key step in the evolution of the Thirteen Colonies into the United States of America was the adoption of a common currency.

The good news is that all the old European great powers (except Russia) will be included. The bad news is that all the old European powers will be included, except Russia.

WHERE TO GO THIS WEEKEND

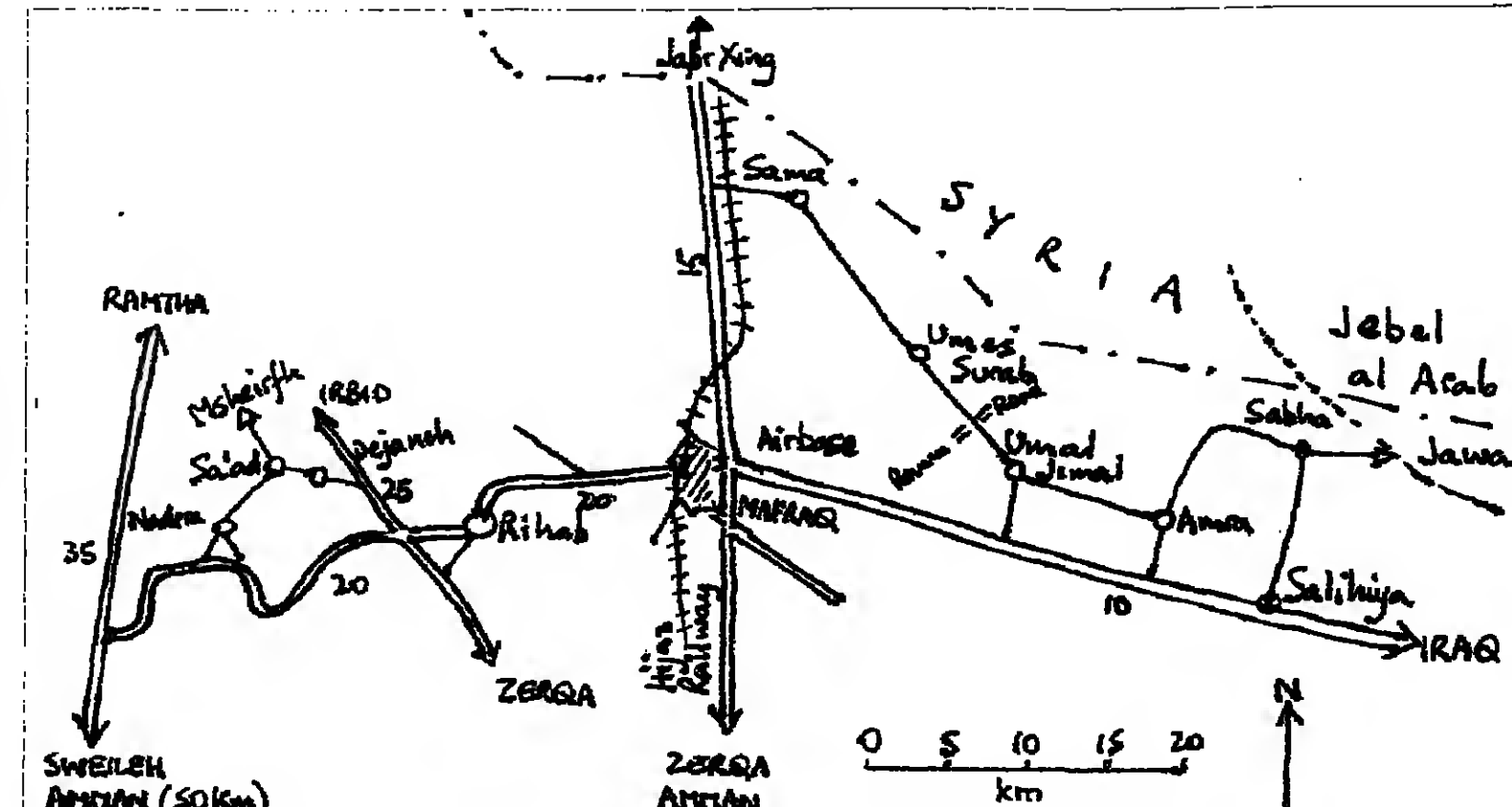
Trekking through Byzantine borderlands

This feature is the third in a short series providing information on the less frequented parts of the country. Geography teacher Richard Tanner guides the reader through the major points of interest.

TAKE THE fast road past Zarqa and Mafrug and, just before the Jaber crossing into Syria, turn right for Sama, one of many Romano-Byzantine towns encircling Jabal al Arab. This old volcano rises to 1750 m., providing rainfall and runoff for the fertile lowlands and black basalt for building towns. Enjoy Sama's Church of St. George and the fifth century towers before they are dismantled. Continue 10 kilometres south-east for Umm es Surab and more Nabataean-Byzantine ruins. Another 10 kilometres brings you over Trajan's via Nova (113AD) to Umm El Jimal, the largest and most complete of these places. Not impressive like Jerash, this was a working town and none-the-less worth a couple of hours pottering round. Use local guides (former 'dig' workers) or Bert de Vries' booklet to find the inscriptions in the 'Bar-racks,' the 'Praetorium,' the West Church and the enormous open reservoir (and covered cisterns) still used by the bedouins. The town remains more or less as the Umayyads left it after the 747 A.D. earthquake shattered it and its trade routes, weakening their dynasty for the Abbasids to take control and re-locate from Damascus to Baghdad.

Every 10 kilometres east brings another old town: Sabab, Umm al-Qutain with a complete church including its ashlar roof, Deir Al Kafh with its fine Roman fort defending Diocletian's outer frontier (late Third Century A.D.) If you've time, a four-wheel drive and a guide, continue to Jawa, one of the greatest walled cities of the Early Bronze Age (4000 years old). But whenever you've had enough, head south, downhill off Jebel al Arab, to the main Baghdad road and turn right for the quick return to Mafrug.

Go into the centre of this military town, which guards Jordan's northern frontier, to find Al Fedein, a small 'tell' with mighty Iron Age towers surviving (850 B.C.). Check the small museum for Greek, Nabataean and Roman artefacts, the twin-humped camel and milestones indicating past trade and travel. Find the small mosque (695 A.D.), early enough to have its



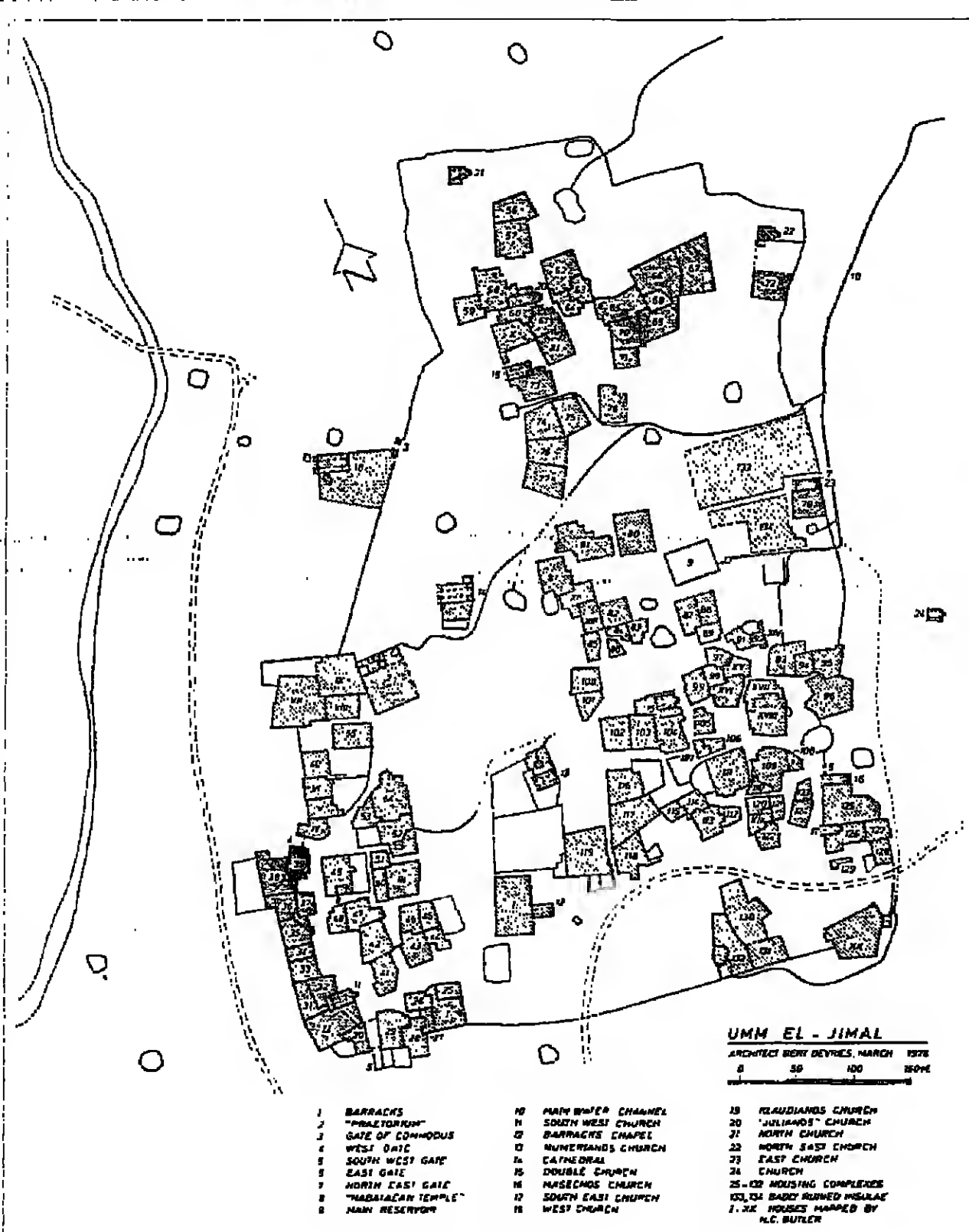
mihrab in the shorter wall, the fine suqco still attached (750 A.D.) and the hammam outside.

Find the road west, over the Hijaz Railway, towards Rehab, an Aramaic capital from the Iron Age. In the valley bottom lies a large reservoir or birket, dated to 62 A.D., which served a community with 16 churches. The 'cathedral' remains, with a small Mamluk mosque inside, whilst a fine mosaic carpet covers the floor of a modest cement house nearby.

Bearing right on the Jerash road brings you to the Zarqa-Irbid crossroads, where you turn right (NW) for a few kilometres towards Irbid before a left has you climb into the hills for Dejanah and Sa'ad. Settlers from Early Bronze through Ottoman times must have enjoyed its cooling breezes at 1000m. Turn left towards Nadera and stop on the hill by the Umayyad mosque which is almost collapsing onto the road. Beyond a Byzantine church is an enormous wine press with 6 vats, tribute to the agricultural wealth once here in these hills. The area is now inhabited mostly by bedouins, some of whom live in the caves opposite; try their home-grown wheat bread if you can.

Continue winding down through rounded hills to reach Nadera and the main road. Turn right towards Jerash and continue winding down till the left turn has you running alongside the Amman road which you eventually join.

Reference: Bert de Vries, Umm El Jimal, Al Kutba Guide, 1990.



Churches clash with German government over asylum policy

By Claire Gallen
Agence France Presse

BONN — Churches in Germany are openly defying the government's tough policy on asylum-seekers by opening their doors to Kurds and other foreigners whose applications for asylum have been turned down.

Just as the government is doing its best to prevent a new influx of Kurds from Turkey and Iraq via Italy, about 50 Turkish Kurds are currently on a hunger strike at a Protestant church in Saarbrücken with the support of the clergy.

The Johanneskirche in the western city near the French border, is one of 56 Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany to have defied the authorities to provide assistance to rejected asylum-seekers.

"It is not legal but it is legitimate from the point of view of our religious beliefs," said a parishioner of the Johanneskirche, where the hunger strike began on Friday.

Today about 220 asylum-seekers, half of them Kurds from Turkey, are being sheltered at German churches or monasteries, according to Martin Rapp

who heads an ecumenical group in Cologne on church asylum policy. He said it was usually parish priests heavily involved in social work who took the initiative of offering foreigners asylum in their churches. It was generally because they thought the government was "wrong" to expel refugees whom they had known and helped for several years, he said.

"It is not legal but it is legitimate from the point of view of our religious beliefs."

Asylum in churches was almost nonexistent in the 1980s, but it has become increasingly common since 1993 when the government toughened laws on asylum.

"The law has become so restrictive that getting a positive response today is exceptional," said Rapp. He said the church attitude "symbolises the shortcomings of the state."

On July 4, Msgr. Karl Lehmann, chairman of the Catholic Bishops Conference and Bishop Klaus Engelhardt, chairman of the Evangelical (Protes-

tant) Church Council, distanced themselves from the government in a joint statement upholding their traditional right to offer asylum even when it went against government policy. The two men then said that since 1983, 2,500 refugees or asylum-seekers had been given shelter by churches, and 70 per cent of them had seen their applications for residence reexamined.

The interior ministry, meanwhile, said the practice of sheltering illegal aliens was "in no way acceptable."

Ministry spokesman Roger Kiel said that taking in illegal aliens the churches "are violating democratically established laws." Relations between the government and church authorities have deteriorated as a result of the friction over asylum policy.

"We are coming under pressure more and more, particularly from the state," said Rapp. He said the authorities were "reluctant to use the margins of

manoeuvre" allowed under the law, to provide illegal aliens with papers to stay in Germany. He spoke of "a score of judicial investigations launched last year against priests or parishioners."

One recent example was the case of Pastor Christian Arndt in the northern city of Hamburg who was accused of being an accomplice of illegal immigrants because he gave shelter to a Kurdish family.

Rapp also condemned police attempts to evict foreigners boled up in church property.

"They began in September 1996. In 1997, police tried four times to dislodge the refugees" from church buildings. In September, a Kurdish family was forcibly removed from a Protestant parish where they had been staying and sent back to Istanbul," Rapp said. The attitude of the churches is not always well perceived by the public as demonstrated by an attempt in June to burn down a church in Luebeck, northern Germany. The building was daubed with Nazi swastikas and the message: "Hail, we'll get you," addressed to the parish priest who had given refuge to an Algerian family.

Olympic torch relay heads off for Nagano

TOKYO (AFP) — A nationwide relay started Tuesday to carry the Olympic flame to Nagano, just about one month before the central Japanese city hosts the last Winter Games of the century.

Some 7,000 people including celebrities are to join the relay and carry the symbolic flame, which arrived in Tokyo late last month after being lit at Olympia, the ancient birthplace of the Olympic Games, on December 19.

Relay runners are to follow three separate routes across the nation, covering a combined 1,150 kilometers through all of Japan's 47 prefectures before coming together again at Nagano.

The 18th Winter Olympics, the second to be held in Asia after the 1972 Games in the Japanese city of Sapporo, is to begin on February 7. It is expected to be the largest ever winter competition with a record entry.

Carrying the silver-coloured torch, 16-year-old high school student Miwa Ishiki started running from a war peace memorial park in the southernmost prefecture of Okinawa on the first of the three courses.

"I'm proud to be the first runner," the female long-distance athlete said before receiving the 55-centimetre torch, designed to resemble the "taimatsu" traditional Japanese torchlight.

Okinawa Governor Masahide Ota told a ceremony: "I hope our resi-

dents' desires of peace will be relayed not only in Japan but throughout the world."

Okinawa was the deadliest battlefield during World War II and is now home to three quarters of U.S. military facilities in the country with some 27,000 of the 47,000 American troops in Japan.

Relays on the other two routes were also launched later in the day — one from the northernmost prefecture of Hokkaido and the other from the southern island of Kyushu.

The pre-Olympic ceremony coincided with the first major snowfalls in one month in Nagano, with organisers breathing a sigh of relief because snow falls had been limited so far, apparently due to the El Nino weather phenomenon.

"We are really relieved," said a spokesman for the Nagano Olympic Organising Committee after five centimeters (two inches) of snow covered the city Tuesday morning.

"Today we received a double present — the successful beginning of the relay and the snowfall," the spokesman said. "We will continue praying for more snow until the Olympics start."

Relay participants, mostly Japanese citizens, include celebrities such as senior tour pro golfer Isao Aoki, male pop singer Koichi Domoto and former boxing world champions Hiroshi Kawashima and Yasuei Yakushiji.

The flame will also be relayed by foreigners, including British anti-land mine activist Chris Moon, who lost his right leg and right hand while mine clearing, organisers said.

Midori Ito, a former figure skating world champion and Olympic silver medalist, has been chosen for the final run to light the cauldron at the main stadium at the highlight of the February 7 opening ceremony.

A total of 71 countries have submitted entry forms to compete in the Winter Olympics, organisers said on Monday.

If all of them field athletes, after satisfying qualification standards set by international winter sports federations, it would make the Games the biggest in terms of the number of participating countries.

A record 67 nations took part in the last Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, in 1994.

The Nagano Games will also be the biggest in terms of programme — 68 events including new sports like women's ice hockey, curling and snowboarding.

Kenya, Mongolia and Portugal have recently asked to have the qualifications of their athletes approved for the 16-day Games.

Final confirmation of the number of countries will be made after January 26 when national Olympic committees must submit the names of the athletes they plan to enter.

FINA crack down on 'submarine' butterfly starts

PERTH (AFP) — World swimming body FINA has cracked down on the 'submarine' underwater start to butterfly races, but the rule will not apply to next week's world championships here.

FINA delegates voted at their congress here Monday to limit the distance swum underwater in the discipline to 15

Chinese critics told to get facts straight

PERTH (AFP) — The Chinese swim team arrived here Tuesday for the world swimming championships with a blunt message for their Australian drugs accuser Don Talbot: "Get the facts."

The Chinese have aroused global suspicion over their spectacular improvement in world swimming since 1994 with allegations of drug abuse, particularly among their sensational women swimmers.

Talbot, the head Australian swim coach, has been one of China's most hostile critics.

Suspicious about the Chinese surfaced again in the run-up to the Perth championships after world-shattering performances at last October's Chinese National Games in Shanghai.

Chinese women set two world records and recorded 1997 best times in eight of 13 individual events, prompting Talbot to label them drug cheats.

The Australian Swimming Coaches Association last year called on world governing body FINA to impose a blanket ban on Chinese competitors at the Perth world championships over their suspicions of drug use.

The head of the Chinese delegation, Shi Tianshu, declared his athletes "clean" upon their arrival here Tuesday.

He cautioned Talbot to "get the facts" before pointing the finger at China.

Shi said FINA had carried out more than 100 out-of-competition tests on Chinese swimmers in the past two months and none had turned out positive.

"The Chinese Swimming Federation has taken serious anti-doping measures also, conducting more than 650 tests in the past year," he said.

"We believe the purpose of sport is to improve the people's health and also to make friendships."

"Sport is very useful for communication with each other. This is our purpose."

Le Jingyi, the 50m and 100m freestyle world record holder, who was chased around Perth's airport terminal by cameramen and journalists, said she had been forced to withdraw from her individual races here owing to a recurring elbow injury and would only contest the 100m freestyle relay.

Le was a sensation at the 1994 Rome world championships where she established both world records as well as winning gold as a member of China's powerful freestyle and medley relay teams.

8th World Swimming Championships — Perth, Australia



Russia's Alexander Popov adjusts his goggles before a training session at the Challenge Stadium pool in Perth January 6. Popov, the Australian-based Russian who is the only person to have retained the 50 and 100 metre freestyle titles at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, will be competing in the 8th World Swimming Championships freestyle events starting January 12 (Reuters photo)

Schoolboy to make India's debut at Winter Olympics

NEW DELHI (AFP) — A 16-year-old schoolboy is set to become India's first representative at the Winter Olympics — in a sport totally unknown in the country of 960 million people.

Shiva Keshavan, a final-year student at the Lawrence School in the north Indian hill resort of Sanawar, will compete in the luge at the Olympics in the Japanese city of Nagano next month.

In a land in love with cricket and hockey, most people would not recognise a luge if it hit them in the shins.

Keshavan's place in

India's sport hall of fame, however, will be assured when he tackles his first run at the Games, using equipment borrowed from abroad.

Keshavan, whose mother is Italian and father from the southern Indian state of Kerala, flew out to Nagano on Tuesday.

While his schoolfriends stuck to India's favourite sports, Keshavan first took up skiing at his home at the foot of the Himalayas before taking to the luge almost two years ago.

He was spotted by Austrian coach Gunter Lemmerer at an introductory coaching camp organ-

ised by the International Luge Federation in India in 1996 and invited to train in Austria.

Keshavan's first major international appearance, however, proved a disaster. Selected for the world championships, he broke his ankle during a training run.

But he impressed the national selectors in the World Cup in Calgary, earning himself a berth for Nagano.

Keshavan said before leaving: "You need at least five years at the top to win a medal. I've barely been two years in the sport."

"When I was training in

Calgary, the top stars were already in Nagano. Now I will get barely three weeks to tune up for my event."

"It is important to get used to the track. I need to have the course at the back of my mind so that I do not lift my head at a crucial time and slow myself down."

He had hoped that his parents could watch him perform in Nagano.

"I would feel so much more secure with them around," Keshavan said. "But they have already spent so much on my making the trip that it will be unrealistic to expect them to come."

Sheringham's trick in the wall sparks free-kick row

LONDON (AFP) — English referees are to discuss ways to prevent players helping goals being scored from free-kicks by deliberately pulling opponents out of defensive walls.

Manchester United's Teddy Sheringham sparked the move after television replays revealed he created a hole in Chelsea's wall to help David Beckham score United's second goal during Sunday's 3-3 FA Cup win at Stamford Bridge.

England striker Sheringham could be seen dragging Chelsea's Dan Petrescu away from the edge of the wall, leaving a gap through which Beckham bent a free-kick into the net to put United 2-0 up.

Referee Steve Lodge gave the goal but said after viewing the replay: "When the Premier League referees hold their next workshop to compare notes and look at clips of certain incidents I shall raise Beckham's free-kick as a discussion point."

"There is clearly an issue to address. When the kick was taken I was standing near the opposite end of the wall to Sheringham and Petrescu, so they were effectively on my blind side."

"If I had been in a position to see Sheringham do something not in accordance with the laws, I would have penalised him."

"The concept of an opponent forming the extra brick in the wall and pulling the last defender out of the firing line is new to me."

It may not be so new to former Nottingham Forest striker Sheringham, however.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s Forest, under legendary manager Brian Clough, developed the technique of adding a player to the opposition wall who would then drag the last man out of the way as free-kick specialist Stuart Pearce approached the ball.

The play was most notably used to help Pearce score from a free-kick against Coventry in the 1990 League Cup semi-finals and again in the 1991 FA Cup final against Tottenham at Wembley.

In a 3-1 win at Liverpool earlier this season Sheringham, who joined Forest for just over a year at the start of the 1991-92 season, again appeared to create a hole — this time in the middle of the wall — for Beckham to score with another pinpoint free-kick.

McRae leads Subaru defence of World title

LONDON (AFP) — Colin McRae, Piero Liatti and Kenneth Eriksson will again spearhead Subaru's defence of their world rallying championship this year.

McRae and fellow Briton Nick Grist, who narrowly failed to win the driver's title last season, will be joined in a full 14-round world championship campaign by the all-Italian crew of Liatti and Fabrizio Pons.

Eriksson will drive those rallies where experience of the terrain is invaluable.

So, McRae and Liatti get the ball rolling in the Monte Carlo Rally on January 17 and are then joined by Eriksson for the Swedish Rally on February 5.

"I believe we have the strongest team in 1998 and am as confident as ever that we will again be the forerunners from the outset," said Subaru Team manager John Spiller.

"Although Kenneth will be doing fewer rallies than last year I am delighted that he has agreed to stay and be a vital part of our assault on both titles," Spiller added.

League cup exits for Monaco, Strasbourg

PARIS (AFP) — French champions Monaco dumped their lowest priority for the season when they slid out of the League Cup Monday to second division opposition in the shape of Niort, who won 3-1 on penalties.

Monaco gave their sparse support in the Louis II stadium little to cheer on a blustery night in the principality as Niort stubbornly refused to be steamrollered by Jean Tigana's European Cup quarter-finalists.

With the two sides locked at 1-1 after extra-time it was

Niort who showed the greater poise when both sides were put on the spot.

League leaders Metz are through to the last 16 after they came from behind to win 2-1 at second division Gueugnon. Vladan Lukic netting a late winner.

But holders Strasbourg are out, following a 3-2 defeat at Cannes. That result, following on from their UEFA Cup exit at Inter Milan, leaves the Alsace club free to concentrate on their battle against relegation.

metres to fall in line with other form strokes, backstroke and breaststroke. The rule takes effect from March 6.

The controversial technique was mastered by Russian Denis Pankratov, who swam underwater for up to 40m of the first 50m lap on his way to winning the 100m butterfly gold medal at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Pankratov also established a world record of 52.27 seconds in the race, which was subsequently lowered by Australian Michael Klim's 52.15s in Brisbane last October.

Pankratov will not be competing at this year's world championship, because of fatigue.

The 'submarine' technique revolutionised butterfly competition with Pankratov's success from 1994 to 1996 establishing a trend and leading many of the sport's best butterflyers to copy his style.

Of the existing longcourse butterfly world records only two — the 100m and 200m — standards set by American Mary T. Meagher in 1981 — did not feature the underwater method.

FINA made a similar past ruling on the underwater practice for backstroke, a technique that helped American David Berkoff set a 100m world record in 1988 and was instrumental in Japan's Daichi Suzuki winning an Olympic gold medal.

The world body also decided at its congress to introduce semi-finals at major meets and recognise world records for the 50m backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly. They will take effect in March.

Popov awaits showdown with Klim

PERTH (AFP) — Last year the great Alexandre Popov called Michael Klim "my little brother".

Now a week before their 100-metre showdown at the world swimming championship here the mood is cordial, perhaps not so chummy.

The double Russian Olympic sprint champion, the world's fastest man in water, lives in Australia and trains with Klim under his old coach Gennadi Touretski in the national capital Canberra.

When at the European championship in Seville last August Popov was asked about 20-year-old Klim he gushed, calling the shaven-headed Australian "my little brother."

Since then Klim has broken Popov's compatriot Denis Pankratov's 100m butterfly world record and is now ranked No. 2 to Popov in the 100m freestyle with a best 1997 time of 49.15 seconds — just 0.13 seconds behind the Russian's quickest.

Yet 26-year-old Popov holds the world record of 48.21s at Monte Carlo in June 1994.

Maybe a closing of the gap between the two training partners has added

some electricity between the pair, although the laconic Popov plays down any intense rivalry, deflecting it more as a media beat-up.

"My relationship is close with my wife, not with Michael Klim," Popov half-joked at his press conference Tuesday.

"We're still good friends, we're still sharing the lane in the (training) pool, we're still sharing the gym, we're doing the same amount of work, but he's doing his preparation and I'm doing my own preparation."

When pressed about the buildup to the anticipated 100m showdown on Wednesday week, Popov smilingly turned on his questioner: "You are trying to promote a little bit of a battle between us, right? I don't want to do that."

"If you wish to do that, well you can do it, but when we come to the race we'll see who's the fastest, but I've got nothing against him and I hope he's got nothing against me."

"He's a good guy, a good personality and he's maturing and he's developing and it's good to see the younger generation is able to do the same things as I did a few years ago."

"I don't feel under any

pressure that Michael is going to be racing me. "I'm here to do my job and he's here to do his best and that's the big difference."

Such is Popov's galvanising effect on a major meet that he is expected to go under his world record, yet he was in no way predicting any lowering of his three-and-a-half-year record.

"It comes automatically. You just step on the blocks and just do it, you never think about it (breaking a world record)."

"The limit is in your head, not in your arms, not in your muscles. Your head should be prepared for the fast swim and if it's not you can put the fins on, but you still wouldn't do anything. "I guess I am a little bit better than I was for the European championship last year, so hopefully it will help."

That throwaway line following four gold medals at Seville last August has upped the ante for Klim and his other world championship race rivals.

Popov is the defending 100m world champion having beaten American Gary Hall in Rome in 49.12secs four years ago.

TODAY AT	CINEMA TEL: 634144	CINEMA TEL: 634144	CINEMA TEL: 699238	CINEMA TEL: 677420	CINEMA TEL: 079 33430	CINEMA TEL: 079 33430	Bisham Yanes Theatre TEL: 625155
	PHILADELPHIA "1"	PHILADELPHIA "2"	PLAZA	CONCORD	GALLERIA 2	GALLERIA 1	NOW ON DAILY
	George Clooney & Nicole Kidman ... in	Winona Rider & Anne Bancroft ... in	SCREAM Shows: 12:00, 6:30	MR. BEAN Shows: 12:15, 2:15	ABDOUN Demi Moore ... in	ABDOUN Jim Carie... in	THE GOVERNMENT
	THE PEACEMAKER	AMERICAN QUILT	AL MASEER (Arabic) Nour Al Sharif Shows: 8:30, 10:45	MURDER 1600 Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	THE JUROR Shows: 8:30, 10:30	THE CABLE GUY Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	IN THE SERVICE
	Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	HERCULES Shows: 2:00 p.m.	MR. BEAN Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30	GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE Shows: 2:00, 6:30		OF PEOPLE
							Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas
							For reservations call: 640155, 625155

Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem town

Arafat moves Tuesday meeting with Ross to Bethlehem to be able to attend celebrations

BETHLEHEM (AP) — Singing hymns, Orthodox Christians marched in a procession from Manger Square into the Church of the Nativity on Tuesday to celebrate Christmas in Jesus' birthplace.

The worshippers were led by the Greek Orthodox patriarch, Diodoros II, who wore a red cloak over a black robe and carried a small cross studded with precious stones.

Patriarch Diodoros arrived in Bethlehem, about eight kilometres south of Jerusalem, in a convoy escorted by Palestinians on horseback. In the Church of the Nativity, a basilica built over the grotto where tradition says Jesus was born, he blessed the faithful with a wave of his cross.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, a Muslim, moved his business to Bethlehem from the West Bank town of Jericho on Tuesday to be able to attend the festivities. During the evening, President Arafat was to meet in Bethlehem with U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross.

Due to differences in the calendar, the Orthodox Christmas Eve falls on Jan. 6 — the day the Western churches mark the Epiphany, or the day the three wise men visited the infant Jesus.

Tuesday's festivities drew some 3,000 people, most of them Palestinian Christians who sang hymns as they followed Patriarch Diodoros and clergymen with red embroidered capes into the church. Palestinian boy scouts playing bagpipes and drums marched in Manger Square.

Bethlehem Mayor Hanna Nasser said the city was trying to give the celebrations a more religious feel than in the past. In the past two years, just after the Palestinian National Authority took control of Bethlehem, there had been



Greek Orthodox Patriarch Diodoros II, holds up a jewelled cross as he makes his way across Manger Square toward the Church of the Nativity during the Orthodox Christmas procession in the West Bank town of Bethlehem Tuesday. Diodoros is flanked by Bethlehem Mayor Hanna Nasser and Bethlehem district governor Mohammad Jabari (AP Photo)

some complaints that Christmas had turned into a celebration of Palestinian nationalism.

Palestinian Christians said they have been enjoying the holiday more since the end

of Israeli occupation in December 1995.

"We feel more relaxed. We don't have to worry about Israeli soldiers harassing the young guys in the square," said Wael Qumsiya, a 25-

year-old Christian from the nearby town of Beit Sahour.

About half the Palestinian Christians living in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Israel celebrate Christmas according to the Eastern calendar.

Israeli settlers reprimand Ross over Jewish origins

TEL AVIV (AFP) — A leader of Israel's settler movement chided U.S. peace envoy Dennis Ross Tuesday over his Jewish origins, warning him against trying to pressure Israel into making concessions to the Palestinians.

"If a son of Moses like Dennis Ross wants to pressure the elected government of Israel, we'll show him what pressure is all about," said Aharon Domb, head of the Jewish settlers' council, shortly before the U.S. diplomat arrived here for a new mediation effort.

"If Ross wants to influence the Israeli government, let him take Israeli nationality," Mr. Domb said on Israeli army radio.

"We will gladly help him obtain it thanks to our rela-

tions with the interior ministry. If he doesn't want to, he can go back to the United States," Mr. Domb said.

Mr. Ross' mission is to gain approval for key elements of the package prior to separate meetings scheduled in Washington later this month between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The U.S. package centres on Israel carrying out a new troop withdrawal from the West Bank and slowing down settlement growth in exchange for tougher Palestinian action against terrorism and an agreement to hold accelerated negotiations on a permanent peace agreement between the two sides.

Settlers and other Israeli nationalists who make up a dominant part of Mr. Netanyahu's government are furious over U.S. insistence that Israel carry out a significant new troop withdrawal from the West Bank.

The militants said they planned to hold protest demonstrations outside Mr. Ross' Jerusalem hotel and his various meeting sites over the U.S. pressure.

Settlers already pasted up posters around Jerusalem early Tuesday proclaiming "Ross go home."

"We are going to organise car convoys to follow him wherever he goes so he knows what real pressure is," said another settler spokesman, Benny Katzover.

Israel releases 23 Palestinian prisoners including Elayan

BETHLEHEM (AFP) — A woman member of Islamic Jihad who conducted a month-long hunger strike was freed from prison Tuesday by Israel amid the release of 23 Palestinian prisoners to mark Ramadan, a Palestinian official said.

Itaf Elayan was released Tuesday evening and was returning to her home in the West Bank town of Bethlehem, Hisham Abdul Razeq, the top Palestinian official on prisoners, told AFP.

The Israeli army had announced earlier that it would release 23 Palestinian

prisoners "in the coming days" to mark the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan, which began a week ago.

Israel agreed not to renew Ms. Elayan's three-month administrative detention in return for her ending a 40-day hunger strike which she launched after her arrest on Oct. 21.

Ms. Elayan, 35, won widespread popularity among Palestinians with her strike, which put her in a prison hospital, and Islamic Jihad had threatened to make Israel "pay a heavy price" if she died in prison.

Her case had also been

taken up by human rights groups, including London-based Amnesty International.

She was arrested under a general Israeli crackdown against Islamist activists and was held under administrative detention laws which allow continuous, open-ended detention without evidence or charges.

She had already served nine years in an Israeli prison but was freed in a general release of 30 women prisoners by Israel in February.

Israel holds around 3,000 Palestinians in its prisons, including around 800 under administrative detention.

Israel, Turkey, U.S. forge ahead with manoeuvres despite criticism

HAIFA (AFP) — U.S., Turkish and Israeli navy ships and aircraft launched joint exercises in this Israeli port Tuesday as Arab states increased their criticism of the widening Turkey-Israel military alliance.

The three navies were to embark on an air-and-sea search-and-rescue manoeuvre in international waters some 30 to 165 kilometres off the coast of Israel on Wednesday morning.

A U.S. destroyer, two Turkish frigates and Israeli vessels coordinated their communications and flight systems and held computer simulations of the exercise on Tuesday at the Navy Tactical Exercise Centre in Haifa, Israeli army officials said.

The exercise went ahead despite protests from Greece, Iran and Arab countries including Syria, whose Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam said Tuesday in Paris that the Turkish-Israeli relations were "dangerous for the region's stability."

Officials from the three navies and a Jordanian observer insisted the manoeuvres, dubbed Reliant Mermaid, did not include any military exercises and were only meant to coordinate emergency operations.

"The purpose of the exercise is to practise and coordinate search-and-rescue operations between three countries in case of possible accidents at sea," Turkish Colonel Husnu Dag told reporters at a press conference in Tel Aviv.

Israeli army spokesman Major Simon Rothwell said the countries had sent army boats but "we will not be doing any firing. There is nothing military."

Each navy was due Wednesday to operate in different areas of the sea. But the teams would also coordinate such difficult operations as landing a helicopter of one nation on a ship of another, the army said.

"The goal of these exercises is for the navies to get acquainted with each other's work procedures," Deputy Navy Commander Yedidiah Hayati told army radio.

Participating in the 12-hour exercise on Wednesday will be two Turkish frigates with an AB 212 helicopter and the U.S. destroyer USS John Rodgers with two helicopters.

The Israelis sent the INS Lahav, a Saar Missile Corvette with a Panther helicopter, the INS Nitzaon, a Saar 4 missile boat, and a Sea Scan aircraft.

To facilitate coordination, each ship will host liaison officers from the two other nations, the army said.

Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai "expressed satisfaction" Tuesday that a high-ranking

observer had been sent by Jordan despite harsh protests from its Islamic leaders and Arab neighbours.

U.S. and Turkish ships arrived in Haifa Monday to start the exercises that are the culmination of increased military cooperation between Israel and Turkey since the two states signed a defence pact in February 1996.

Criticism by most members of the Arab League of the Israeli-Turkish alliance caused a delay in the manoeuvres last summer — and again in November.

Turkey showed increased interest in improving ties with Israel and the U.S. especially after the 15-nation European Union refused last month to consider Turkey's candidacy to join the group.

Turkey announced last week that Israeli state defence firms had won a \$75 million contract to upgrade F-5 fighter jets in collaboration with a firm from Singapore.

Israel and Turkey had already signed a \$630 million deal for Israel to upgrade Turkish F-4 aircraft. In addition, the two countries will cooperate on production of Israel's Popeye land-to-air missile.

Under the 1996 military deal, Israel trains Turkish fighter pilots in exchange for Israel's use of Turkish air space.

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The Ross-Netanyahu talks took place amid speculations, even from within the cabinet, that it will not survive for long. With the support of only 63 Knesset members, Justice Minister Tzahi Hanegbi said, the government may not have good chances to survive. "This is the last supper. It must be said truthfully: If Levy doesn't come back, this government has no chance of lasting," Hanegbi, who is very close to Netanyahu, told the Likud faction meeting on Monday.

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A Romanian dictator Antonescu had syphilis

BUCHAREST (AFP) — Romanian war-time dictator Ion Antonescu, who once declared that only real men contract syphilis, was struck with the disease himself and refused treatment, a historian said Tuesday. In an interview with the daily Ziua newspaper, historian Mihai Stoenescu said that Antonescu, who was allied with Hitler's Nazi Germany, contracted the illness with seven other military officers and refused treatment in the belief that his will-power would rid him of the disease. Stoenescu, in a book on the dictator to appear soon, quoted Antonescu as often saying that "one who has never been stricken with syphilis is not a real man."

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EU to discuss aid to Algerian people

PARIS (AFP) — European Union countries will begin talks next Thursday in Brussels on doling out aid to the people of Algeria, hit by some of the worst massacres in six years of bloody turmoil. French officials said Tuesday.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anne Gazeau-Secret said officials from the 15 EU nations would meet on Thursday as well as next week to hammer out proposals that could be put to EU foreign ministers meeting on Jan. 25.

The preparatory talks would be at political directors' level, she told reporters.

"As the British presidency of the EU has suggested, we will be discussing useful measures for the Algerian people," she said.

The move follows weekend reports of what was probably the worst massacre of civilians in Algeria's six-year unrest. As

many as 400 men, women and children were hacked and slashed to death in four villages in western Algeria last week, presumably by Islamists. More slayings have been reported daily.

"The 15 have identical concerns vis-a-vis the Algerians," Ms. Gazeau-Secret added.

"They [the concerns] stem from deep emotion over the atrocious suffering of the Algerian people, from an unreserved condemnation of terrorist crimes and from a wish to show solidarity with the people, without interfering in Algeria's internal affairs."

Britain, current six-month EU chair, on Monday said European aid to the survivors of Algeria's recent massacres was an option to be discussed.

"We are ready and expect to explore with the Algerian government how we can help the victims," a Foreign Office

spokesman told AFP, adding that discussions would take place in due course.

Germany called Sunday for urgent EU action after the continuing bloodshed in Algeria and for Europe to aid the victims of the terror.

France, Italy, Portugal and Sweden said they would support such aid.

German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel also said Sunday that an EU troika — including the past, current and future six-month EU chair — could visit Algeria to propose cooperation in the struggle against terrorism. Fighting and killings since early 1992 have claimed at least 60,000 lives, according to Western estimates, with Amnesty International putting the toll at 80,000.

Post-Levy era: a more extreme government

Elias Zananiri

AS OF Wednesday morning, a new government takes over in Israel but without elections or a cabinet reshuffle. Nothing else but the resignation of Foreign Minister David Levy on Sunday that has left the last of a trio-moderate ministers in Benjamin Netanyahu's government: Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai. It is therefore early to predict how long this government will last, if at all. Netanyahu might have successfully passed the budget test through the Knesset on Monday. But his real test is still ahead: the second redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank, which he promised to carry out, though with a set of pre-conditions he is demanding of the

Palestinian National Authority.

Before Levy, it was ex-finance minister Dan Meridor who resigned over differences with Netanyahu. Meridor, Levy and Mordechai are the only three ministers within the Likud coalition who support the Oslo Accords and consequently support the implementation of their clauses. With both Levy and Meridor out, there is doubt that Mordechai can take on his shoulder the weight of implementing the redeployment, certainly not with such an influential number of right-wingers who have been threatening to topple Netanyahu's government should he go ahead and withdraw.

The post-Levy Israeli cabinet is not the same as it was

before, though Levy, as a matter of fact, had very little to say as far as Israel's foreign policy was concerned. Almost every task that in theory fell under the foreign minister's responsibility was done by Netanyahu, or alternatively, by one of his top aides. No wonder that Levy finally decided to quit. Apart from his concern over the budget distribution and the absence of his major constituencies from the list of money recipients, Levy was disturbed by the fact that his role as foreign minister was marginalised by Netanyahu, especially when it came to holding talks with the Palestinians. Now Mordechai seems to be going on the footsteps of Levy. With his earnest wish to go ahead with the redeployment and to stand by

his past promises to honour the agreements, Mordechai might find himself, perhaps within months, obliged to make a choice between his portfolio and his commitments. Netanyahu, under the pressure of the dominant extreme right, will try to postpone, if not cancel, the redeployment, and Mordechai, as such, may have to go home.

Currently, both the Third Way and the ultra-orthodox religious Shas party support the redeployment and even threaten that without the redeployment, they might pull out of the government. On the other hand, other coalition members like Tsomet of Rafael Eitan and Moledet of Rehavam Zeevi threaten that if Netanyahu decides to implement the second redeploy-

ment, they will bring his government down. The only saviour that Netanyahu might have to rely on, ironically enough, is the opposition Labour Party, which has so far failed to give a crystal-clear answer to whether its members will vote for Netanyahu if he goes ahead or whether they would let him fall down, even if the reason is his commitment to the Oslo Accords.

Over the past weeks, the Labour Party has been holding discussions on whether they should provide Netanyahu with a so-called security net that prevents the fall of his government once the redeployment is brought up to the Knesset. Many argue that the party should find a way out of this dilemma without harming its image as an advocate of peace with the PNA and the Arab countries. But very recently, the party seems to

have taken its decision: to bring Netanyahu down no matter what means or price are involved.

Netanyahu himself told reporters after the Knesset vote on the budget that he is convinced he will be able to get his cabinet make a positive decision on the second phase withdrawal, just as he forged a majority for the authorisation of the budget. "It will be hard, but I am sure that I will be able to persuade members of the coalition about the necessity of the decision," he said. With this self-confidence, Netanyahu met with U.S. special envoy to the Middle East, Dennis Ross, who arrived in Israel Tuesday afternoon for a series of meetings with Netanyahu and with PNA President Yasser Arafat. Netanyahu, Israeli sources said, is aware of the fact that Ross is trying to gauge the

chances that the present coalition under the present circumstances can carry out the Oslo accords. Israeli papers reported Tuesday that in the 48 hours before Ross' arrival, senior U.S. officials spoke over the phone with various Israeli officials in a bid to gauge the chances of Netanyahu's political survival after Levy's resignation.

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